

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PINHAS

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 1:1-2:3

JULY 10-11, 2015 24 TAMUZ 5775

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Yisroel Moshe Ben Chasya Miriam

In memory of my grandfather Reuben Bibi 23 Tamuz, this Friday
And in memory of my grandmother Victoria bat Rosa – Victoria Cohen Gindi – Rosh Hodesh Ab

Rosh Hodesh Ab will be celebrated on Friday, July 17.

No meat meals are permitted (except for Shabbat) from Saturday night, July 18 until Sunday night, July 26.

Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday nights and all evening services this weekend
Minha & Arbit 7:00 PM -Candle Lighting 8:09 PM

Shabbat

Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM – Latest Shema 8:23AM

Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30

Rabbi David is scheduled to give the derasha

Kiddish sponsored by Bobby and Hindy to commemorate the third yehrtzeit of Hindy's brother
Yisroel Moshe Ben Chasya Miriam

We can still use Kiddush Sponsors for next Shabbat July 18th & Shabbat September 12th

**Additionally to avoid confusion in reserving Kiddush dates, we suggest you don't rely on simply telling someone. Please email us at SephardicCongregation@gmail.com, with details of date and type of Kiddush or even better, visit our website BenaiAsher.org
And select sponsor a Kiddush and fill in the appropriate fields**

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer

Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/

Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at the Bach for June 5:30 PM

Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon: 7:00 - Minha 7:30 PM - Seudat Shelishit 8:00 PM

Rabbi David is scheduled to give the class

Eliyahu, Pinchas, Cozbi, Zimri, Rabbi Akiva and Tunes Rufus

Birkat HaMazon 8:50PM Arbit 8:55 PM – Shabbat Ends at 9:08

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday 8:00AM – followed by breakfast and class

Monday, Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM

Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:45 PM

LOOKING FORWARD:

Next Friday begins the 9 days so after next Shabbat – no meat the following week,

The fast of Tisha Be'Av is pushed from Saturday July 25th to Sunday July 26th

To make a payment or donate on line

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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– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

Editors Notes

In a letter written to his friend Jean-Baptiste Leroy in November of 1789, Benjamin Franklin made famous the words of Daniel Defoe. He wrote, "Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." We've all heard the phrase that, "Nothing is certain but death and taxes." Lawyers and accountants do the best to minimize their client's obligation to the latter. And it seems that mankind has always been consumed with warding off the former.

Popular literature, television and movies are filled with immortal characters. Many are dark figures including vampires in their various incarnations, Voldemort from Harry Potter and Davy Jones from Pirates of the Caribbean. In the TV series Forever, Dr. Henry Morgan is a New York City medical examiner who studies the dead for criminal cases, and to solve the mystery of his own immortality. In the children's novel, Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt, a family is made physically immortal by drinking water from a magical spring. In the movie Death Becomes Her, the characters of Madeline Ashton and Helen Sharp both become immortal and young after drinking a potion. And in the film Hocus Pocus, we meet an immortal cat who was a human being. (I googled all of that!)

The Talmud lists nine people who never died (others increase this number to thirteen). The most famous of them all is Eliyahu or Elijah the Prophet. It is Elijah who attends each of our seders on Passover. And as long as a chair is set aside for him, he attends every Brit Milah. It is Elijah who rises to heaven in a fiery chariot as his student Elisha looks on. And it is Elijah who we await to announce the arrival of the mashiach.

Back at the burning bush, when Moses begs G-d to excuse him from the mission of taking the Jewish people from Egypt and bringing them to the land of Canaan, he suggests an alternate. "Send them in the hands of the one you will send", Moses asks. And the

rabbis suggest he is referring to Eliyahu who G-d will send at the end of days.

When the Talmud ends off with a question that is unresolved, the word Teyku is used. Teyku is not a word with meaning. It's letters Taf, Yud, Kuf and Vav form an acronym for "The Tishbite will solve the difficulties and problems." This refers to Eliyahu HaTishbi, who in the future days will solve all standing legal disputes.

Some rabbis didn't have to wait. The Talmud and other sources often tell of Eliyahu coming to visit and explaining and answering questions.

Kabbalists suggest that just as our present day phone calls use cell towers and transfer stations to take our voice from one end of the world to another, our prayers also have a conveyance system. Our words travel from our minds and mouths, through our hands, across the sea to the cave of machpelah, through the tomb of Rachel to the temple site in Jerusalem. From their Eliyahu in his angelic form takes those prayers up to the secretary of the interior who places them before the heavenly throne.

It is Eliyahu who takes our prayers up and brings the answers down. It is Eliyahu who moves from realm to realm. It is Eliyahu who exists as a man and as an angel. It is Eliyahu who greets us at birth, who visits with us when we celebrate and who will user in the end of days.

Yet we know very little of him. With Moses we hear of his birth, we hear of his youth and are introduced to his parents. With Eliyahu, we have none of that. Open up Kings 17 and see. Eliyahu the Tishbite, from among the residents of the Gilad, said to Ahab: By G-d... there will be no rain or dew these years, unless I say so. As Rabbi Shabtai Sabato writes: The Bible gives us no prior word as to who Eliyahu was or what were his qualifications to be Prophet. We meet him here for the first time, learning that it is he who holds the keys to the rain and dew that are to fall - or not - on the Land of Israel. And in fact, the rain did fall only when he gave the word.

Wait a minute; I thought only Hashem holds the keys to rain. But that's not all. We learn as we continue the same chapter, that Eliyahu also holds the keys to resurrecting the dead. During the three-year drought, Hashem commanded Eliyahu to live in the home of a widow in Tzidon. While he was there, the woman's small son became sick "until there was no breath left in him." Eliyahu takes the boy and prays strongly to Hashem and in fact, the unbelievable happens and

the boy's soul is restored and he is brought back to life.

In what merit is Eliyahu given all this?

Even stranger the rabbis tell us that Pinchas, the hero of this week's portion, the one who stepped up to bat and in his zealousness killed Zimri and Cozbi resulting in salvation for Israel, the one who is blessed with the covenant of Shalom, Pinchas is in fact Eliyahu. A reincarnation of Eliyahu? No suggests the Talmud, Pinchas is Eliyahu. Pinchas seems to be alive for centuries and then vanishes from the scene. He disappears for 200 years and then Eliyahu appears. Both have similar qualities. Both are zealots, Both seem to act on the periphery of the law.

The Tanach ends with the following words, Behold, I am sending you Elijah the Prophet ahead of the arrival of the awesome day of Divine Judgment. And he will return the heart of fathers to their sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers.

May we experience that day soon in our time. But all this leaves us with many questions which we have Shabbat to explore. Why are we told Pinchas is Eliyahu, shouldn't it be Eliyahu is Pinchas? Who came first? And what really happened at Shittim for Pinchas to merit eternal life? Who was Zimri and what did he represent? Who was Cozbi, the princess? Who is Eliyahu? Who is Pinchas?

I am looking forward to exploring and looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Asked whether Israel is a racist country, 47% of Democrats said yes, as opposed to 13% of Republicans
Israel losing Democrats, 'can't claim bipartisan US support,' top pollster warns
New survey by Frank Luntz shows almost half of Democratic 'opinion elites' think Israel is racist, barely half believe it wants peace, and three quarters feel it has too much influence on US policy
By David Horovitz July 5, 2015,

Three quarters of highly educated, high income, publicly active US Democrats — the so-called "opinion elites" — believe Israel has too much influence on US foreign policy, almost half of them consider Israel to be a racist country, and fewer than half of them believe that Israel wants peace with its neighbors. These are among the findings of a new

survey carried out by US political consultant Frank Luntz.

Detailing the survey results to The Times of Israel on Sunday, Luntz called the findings "a disaster" for Israel. He summed them up by saying that the Democratic opinion elites are converting to the Palestinians, and "Israel can no longer claim to have the bipartisan support of America."

He said he "knew there was a shift" in attitudes to Israel among US Democrats "and I have been seeing it get worse" in his ongoing polls. But the new findings surprised and shocked him, nonetheless. "I didn't expect it to become this blatant and this deep."

A prominent US political consultant known best for his work with Republicans, Luntz is meeting with a series of high-level Israeli officials this week to discuss the survey and consult on how to grapple with the trends it exposes.

"Israel has won the hearts and minds of Republicans in America, while at the same time it is losing the Democrats," he said. On US politics, "I'm right of center," he added. "But the Israeli government and US Jews have to focus on repairing relations with the Democrats."

Luntz put a series of largely Israel-related questions to 802 members of the opinion elites and his findings have a 3.5% margin of error. The survey, sponsored by the Jewish National Fund, was conducted last week. Among the key findings:

- Asked about Israeli influence on US foreign policy, an overwhelming 76% of Democrats, as compared to 20% of Republicans, said Israel has "too much influence."
- Asked whether Israel is a racist country, 47% of Democrats agreed it is, as opposed to 13% of Republicans. Another 21% of Democrats didn't know or were neutral (as opposed to 12% of Republicans), and only 32% of Democrats disagreed when asked if Israel is a racist country, as opposed to 76% of Republicans. (Overall 32% of those polled said Israel is a racist country.)
- Asked whether Israel wants peace with its neighbors, while an overwhelming 88% of Republicans said it does, a far lower 48% of Democrats agreed. Another 21% of Democrats didn't know or were neutral (as compared to 7% of Republicans). And 31% of Democrats did not think Israel wants peace (as compared to 5% of Republicans).

- Asked whether they would be more likely to vote for a local politician who supported Israel and its right to defend itself, an overwhelming 76% of Republicans said yes, but only 18% of Democrats said yes. Meanwhile, only 7% of Republicans — but 32% of Democrats — said they would be less likely to support a local politician who backed Israel.

- Asked whether they would be more likely to vote for a local politician who criticized Israeli occupation and mistreatment of Palestinians, 45% of Democrats said yes, compared to just 6% of Republicans. Asked whether they would be less likely to vote for a local politician who criticized Israeli occupation and mistreatment of Palestinians, a whopping 75% of Republicans said yes, compared to just 23% of Democrats.

- Asked whether the US should support Israel or the Palestinians, a vast 90% of Republicans and a far lower 51% of Democrats said Israel. Another 8% of Republicans and 31% of Democrats were neutral. And 18% of Democrats said the Palestinians, compared to 2% of Republicans. Overall, 68% of those polled said the US should support Israel, and 10% said the US should support the Palestinians.

- Asked about which side they themselves support, 88% of Republicans and 46% of Democrats said they were “pro-Israeli” while 4% of Republicans and 27% of Democrats said they were “pro-Palestinian.”

- Asked if settlements are an impediment to peace, 75% of Democrats and 25% of Republicans agreed.

A specialist in finding and testing the language that can impact public opinion, Luntz was vehement that Israel’s “messaging” has to be different if support for Israel among US Democrats is to be revived. “Obviously, policy has something to do with it, but the messaging is critical,” he said. “And the Republicans have to realize that their rhetoric is part of the problem: It’s not security that needs to be highlighted, but [Israel’s] social justice and human rights.” Underlining Israel’s role in protecting human rights and promoting equality could be particularly resonant, he said.

The “words that work best” among Republicans, he said, are those along the lines of, “Israel is our strongest ally in the Middle East, and attempts to destroy the country economically and politically could do direct harm to the United States.” By contrast, the “words that work best” among Democrats are those to the effect that, “We should be encouraging more communication and cooperation, not less. We should

be encouraging more diplomacy and discussion, not less.”

There has to be an ‘end to the [use of the] word Zionism,’ Luntz said. ‘If you are at Berkeley or Brown and start outlining a Zionist vision, you don’t get to make a case for Israel because they’ve already switched off’

More specifically, when it comes to the most effective messaging, Luntz found that the statement “Women in Israel have exactly the same rights as men. No other Middle Eastern country offers women fully equal rights” was particularly well received among Democrats, as was the declaration, “Everyone in Israel is free to practice their religion and worship their God. No other Middle Eastern country offers similar religious protections.” By contrast, responses were markedly less positive to statements about the need for a Jewish homeland after the Holocaust, Israeli claims to the Holy Land, and Israel’s start-up technology prowess.

Widely resonant among all those polled, he found, was the statement that “Despite the ongoing conflict with Gaza, Israel still donates tens of millions in humanitarian aid to Palestinians and opens its hospitals to treat them.”

“They don’t care about the ‘Start-Up Nation,’” he said flatly of American opinion elites in general. “It’s tragic that so much effort has been devoted to selling an image of Israel that many aren’t interested in buying.”

Still more drastically, Luntz said the word “Zionism” could play no part in messaging designed to repair relations with US Democrats. There has to be an “end to the [use of the] word Zionism,” he said. “You can’t make the case if you use that word. If you are at Berkeley or Brown and start outlining a Zionist vision, you don’t get to make a case for Israel because they’ve already switched off.”

He also predicted that Israel is in for “a lot more trouble” from the BDS (Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions) campaign. Once they had been informed about the BDS campaign, 19% of respondents supported it — 31% of Democrats and 3% of Republicans. And, stressed Luntz, 60% of America’s opinion elites said they were not familiar with BDS. “Israel is already having trouble with BDS, and Americans don’t even know what it means. Can you imagine how bad it will get?”

He also foresaw a looming battle in the US over foreign aid to Israel. Some 33% of Democrats and 22% of Republicans, his poll found, were upset that

"Israel gets billions and billions of dollars in funding from the US government that should be going to the American people."

Luntz also asked whether respondents see anti-Semitism as a problem in the US. Overall, 58% agreed with the idea that anti-Semitism is a problem in America (57% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats), compared to 28% who disagreed. "Non-Jews recognize the problem, even if some Israelis want to minimize it," he said.

Ironically, the poll also found, 50% of Democrats and 18% of Republicans (and 36% of all respondents) agreed with the proposition that "Jewish people are too hyper-sensitive and too often label legitimate criticisms of Israel as an anti-Semitic attack."

How to Make a Tragic Shiva Call Amanda Bradley Jul 7, 2015 12:52PM

Every shiva is hard, but some are harder than others.

Recently, I went to the second kind of shiva: the shiva for our friend who was tragically, oh-my-God-shockingly, killed in a cycling accident at the age of 36. He was healthy and happy; he had a wife whom he adored and four small children whom he loved. He was an excellent specialist pediatric ophthalmologist who helped children on a daily basis. He had a long, productive, joyous life ahead of him. Except that now, he didn't.

It was hard to believe that he was gone. Hard to believe that life could be ended so suddenly and so finally. Harder, far harder to attend his funeral, to pay a shiva visit to his widowed wife, his fatherless children, his siblings, his parents left broken with the loss of their beloved first-born.

These shivas are scary. We are scared to go to visit those mourning the sudden, too-early, tragic loss of a loved one. We are scared that we'll make it worse. We're scared that we'll catch their pain and won't be able to cope with it. We're scared that we won't know what to say. Sometimes these fears overwhelm us, and we decide not to go.

Because sometimes, people really do say things that make it worse. I have sat silently fuming at a shiva where a woman walked in, interrupted the mourners who were in a fine flow of reminiscence about their mother, and sat down to tell them all about the holiday she had just returned from.

I didn't want to think of anyone making it worse for our friend's family. I didn't want anyone to choose not

to visit them during the shiva, either, because he deserves to be mourned en masse. So here is my list of points for How to behave at a shiva:

1. Don't be scared of silence. If I could write up one golden rule for shiva-visiting, it would be this. Don't be scared of silence. I don't have any kind of statistics, but I suspect that 99% of all hurtful comments were made by someone trying to fill a lull. If the mourners are not talking to you, it's OK to sit quietly until they do. They may be struggling to hold back tears, or remembering a particular memory, or just feeling tired of conversation.

It is the halachah (Jewish law) that when you pay a shiva visit, you may not open the conversation. The mourner has to talk to you first.

2. Don't try to cheer anyone up. This battles number 1 for my golden rule spot. Too many people think that when visiting someone who is sitting shiva, their job is to cheer them up. Which leads them to tell inappropriate stories about something funny their child said yesterday. So let me tell you: That is not your job. Your job is to be with them in their grief. The man or woman who passed away is special enough that he/she deserves to have people cry for them.

Allow the mourners to cry; allow them to be sad; allow them to mourn. Don't try to distract them from their grief or cheer them up out of their pain. If you really feel the need to do something, you can silently hand them the tissues while patting their shoulder, or nod sympathetically and murmur how special so-and-so was. But don't try to cheer them up.

3. Sit down. This might sound trivial, but it is physically uncomfortable and emotionally overwhelming for the mourner, sitting in a low chair, to have a conversation with someone who is towering over them. Pull over a chair, or bend down, or kneel on the floor while you talk.

4. Don't call. The ideal shiva visit is in person, since the mourners are comforted by the physical presence of those who have come in person to share their pain. Phone calls are an intrusion which prevent the mourner from spending time with visitors. Since there is usually not much that can be said, phone calls are not an effective way to communicate comfort and togetherness. Over the phone, you are forced to say something instead of being silent, which increases your risk of saying the wrong thing. It is far, far, far better to write an email or (even better) a snail mail letter that relates your special memories of the deceased and expresses your sympathy, or else to make a phone call after the shiva ends, when the

mourners are left alone and would appreciate hearing from you.

However, if it is physically impossible for you to visit the shiva house in person, it can sometimes be appropriate to call. In that case, keep the call short, and do bear in mind time zone differences and visiting hours. Try to call during the quieter times of day.

5. Timing really is everything. It shouldn't need to be said, but it does. Respect the visiting times that are posted for the shiva. Do not come early (or late) because it was convenient for you. Paying a shiva visit isn't about your convenience.

Do not stay past the visiting times; you will be delaying the mourners from eating their meal, or preventing them from snatching five minutes with their children before they go to bed, or just intruding on time that they desperately need to recoup their energy after an exhausting few hours. My friend told me about a relative of his who was sitting shiva. Visitors came and stayed so long that her mother went upstairs, changed into her nightgown and dressing gown, and came back down again to tell them that they had to leave as it was time for her to go to bed.

If you want to have a longer chat, try to time your visits for quieter times. Davening (praying) times are always busy, and carry on being so for a good hour afterwards, but late-morning and mid-afternoon are usually quieter times when the mourners might be alone for long stretches of time.

And especially if you know that it is a busy shiva, do not turn up 10 minutes before the end of the visiting time. The mourner might be finally getting to the end of a long line of people who were there for ages waiting to talk with them, or they might be longing to have a cup of tea in peace. Or they might really want to talk to you, but will be just too tired by then.

6. If you aren't sure whether or not to visit the shiva, visit the shiva. Because if you don't, then the next time you see the mourner you will be consumed with shame and embarrassment, and at a high risk of either avoiding them or putting your foot in it as you gush out your apologies. You can go for 10 minutes, sit quietly at the back, and then leave. What matters is that you've been there.

7. Remember that it is not about you. I am guilty of this one myself. It is easy to think that if you didn't manage to talk with the mourners, then your shiva visit has been a failure. This is not true. Mourners

aren't always able to talk with everyone who comes, but I have heard over and over again that they appreciate every single person who visits them. Every visitor to the shiva represents someone who loved the deceased—or the mourner—enough to overcome all the fears, make the trip, find a parking space, and come in. And that is a true comfort.

8. Do ask the mourner if you can get them anything. Be concrete: Ask, "Would you like a glass of water? Can I get you a cup of tea?" And if the mourner admits that actually, he/she didn't have time to eat breakfast yet, offer to get them some breakfast, and then (this is the hard part) offer to leave so that they can eat in peace. Chances are good that you'll be asked to stay, but not everyone is comfortable eating in front of others, and the mourners might need to eat more than they need to talk to you. Remind yourself about number 7, and graciously leave.

9. Do ask about the deceased: Especially if you are paying a shiva visit to a friend, but you didn't personally know the relative who passed away. A shiva is, after all, a time for remembering the dead and talking about them. Not your holiday, or the latest news.

You can say, "I'm sorry that I never got to know your mother/father/brother/sister. Could you tell me a bit about them?" Or, "Your mother/father/sibling sounds like a very special person. Tell me, what is your favorite memory?" If there are photos of the deceased, then point to one and ask when it was taken. It gives the mourner an opportunity to talk about their loved one.

10. But don't ask for details about what happened. They might not want to have to relive the events leading up to the death. Or they might be tired of repeating themselves. Unless the mourner leads the conversation this way, don't ask how he/she died. And if the man or woman who passed away died of illness, never, ever question any medical decisions. Don't ask why they didn't get a second opinion, or whether they thought of trying some other approach. Just don't.

11. Introduce yourself. Granted, as per point number 1, you have to wait for the mourner to talk to you first. But once they do, if there is any possibility that they don't remember who you are, remind them of your name and connection to the deceased. Especially if it's your friend who died and you are having to pay a shiva visit to their siblings and parents. Even if they met you once or twice before, in the shock of loss they might not remember you.

And try to introduce yourself to the other mourners before you leave. Look for an opportunity to say your name and how you knew the deceased. It is comforting to hear from someone who knew the deceased in a different context and had a different relationship with him/her.

When you leave, repeat this phrase to the mourners. It might feel weird to you, but ritual is comforting to those in mourning:

מילשוריו ונייצ ילבא ראש רותב מכתא מחני מוקמה
Hamakom yenachem etchem b'toch sha'ar ovlei
Tziyon v'Yerushalayim
May God comfort you along with all the other
mourners for Zion and Jerusalem

Or the sephardi alternative, which I've only just learned:

ומחונת מימשה ון
Min hashamayim tenuchamu
May you be comforted from heaven

If this article helps anyone to pay a painful shivah visit and comfort the mourners, may that be for the merit of Henri Sueke z"l, Moshe ben Yaakov, who died far too young and whose shiva is far too painful. May we all be comforted for this loss, and spared any future pain.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Pinchas - Pinchas' reward, Zelaphcad's daughters, korbanot for the holidays (year 40)

- 1- Hashem rewards pinchus for killing zimri. Hashem tells Moshe to count Benei Israel
- 2- Benei Israel is counted. The families and count for each tribe are listed.
- 3- Israel is divided between the tribes. The tribe of levi is counted. The daughter's of Zelphchad make a case that they should receive land too.
- 4- Zelaphchad's daughter's get land. Moshe is shown the land of Israel and told he will not enter. Yehoshua is appointed as the new leader
- 5- Korbanot - the daily korban (korban tamid), shabbat korbanot and rosh hodesh korbanot
- 6- Korbanot- the pesach, shavout, rosh hashana and kipur korbanot. The issur of doing melacha on each holiday
- 7- Korbanot- the succoth and shemini aseret korbanot. The issur of doing melacha on each holiday.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“On the eighth day shall be Aseret.” (Bemidbar 29:35)

I know it's not Shemini Aseret (Simhat Torah), but I would love to share this story with you as told by Rabbi Dovid Kaplan.

There was no sign of religion on Kibbutz Ein Chaim (name changed). Quite the contrary, they were virulently opposed to anything even remotely Jewish. Pork on Yom Kippur, barbecue on Tish'ah B'Ab, soft rolls on Passover, it was all fine.

It was a mystery to the younger members why a handful of the old-timers would sneak off to some unknown location for some unknown reason one day a year. Maybe it was some sort of gambling night that they didn't want anyone else to know about, or perhaps they got together to reminisce about something or other. Any time one of the participants was asked about it, he'd say, "It's nothing too important and it's clearly nothing that would interest you. It's just something for a bunch of old guys." For some reason, no one ever made any further attempts to find out what it was all about.

Well, one year, Yigal ben Efess (name changed) could contain his curiosity no longer, so he decided to follow the group and see what they were up to. He watched from a distance as they headed all the way out to the farthest corner of the kibbutz, where all the old, rusty equipment lay in disuse, and then entered an old abandoned shed. He waited a few minutes and then followed them in. There was a decrepit, stone staircase that led downstairs and ended in front of a heavily reinforced metal door. He pushed the door open a crack...and saw something that froze him in place and sent shivers up his spine. It was a sight he knew he'd never ever forget. The men were in a well-lit cellar which they'd equipped with bright lights. But it wasn't the light that he was focused on. The men were holding a Sefer Torah and dancing round and round with undisguised emotion, most of them with tears rolling down their cheeks. You see, it was Shemini Aseret night. These men had all been in Europe before the war, and had all learned in cheder. The simhah (joy) they had experienced as small children on that special day had never left them, and they relived it once a year in a clandestine cellar on an anti-religious kibbutz.

You can run but you can't hide. The flame will always find you. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"The daughters of Selofhad drew near."
(Bemidbar 27:1)**

Before the Jews entered the land of Israel, Moshe had the task of dividing up the land amongst the tribes and families of B'nei Yisrael. The daughters of Selofhad, who were not yet married, were not given a portion of land, since Selofhad had died without any sons. The daughters sought out Moshe to present their case and found him teaching Torah. They waited until he began teaching the topic of inheritance, and then they made their claim to Moshe. Their claim was upheld and they were granted the land.

The daughters of Selofhad were praiseworthy for many reasons. They demonstrated a clear grasp of Jewish law, and they had a sincere love for the land of Israel. The Midrash, however, highlights one virtue in particular - their timing. They waited for the most opportune time to approach Moshe and only then did they present their case. What is so special about this trait that the Midrash treats it as their greatest virtue?

The Midrash is teaching us that the crowning virtue of a great person is common sense. Without this, a person can be intellectually brilliant, be packed with knowledge and have beautiful intentions, yet fail in his endeavors. The daughters of Selofhad knew that they must approach Moshe at the right time, and they understood enough to know the best time for their presentation.

It has been noted that common sense is very uncommon. A man can master the complexities of a supercomputer, yet not be able to interface with his fellow man. Through the study of Torah, with the analysis and honest introspection of musar, we can deepen our understanding of human nature and increase our common sense. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Ignoring the Naysayers**

Parashat Pinhas begins with God announcing to Moshe the reward promised to Pinhas, who killed an Israelite man and Midyanite woman as they committed a public act of immorality. Pinhas' act of zealotry brought an immediate end to the devastating plague that God had brought upon the people in response to their immorality with the women of Moab and their worship of the idol Pe'or. God rewards Pinhas with the status of Kehuna (priesthood) and eternal life. (The Sages teach us that Pinhas was Eliyahu, who never died and ascended the heavens alive.)

In announcing His reward to Pinhas, God refers to him as "Pinhas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon

Hakohen" (25:11). Rashi notes the seeming superfluity in this reference to Pinhas. He had already been introduced several verses earlier, at the end of Parashat Balak (25:7), as the son of Aharon's son Elazar. Why did the Torah have to reiterate Pinhas' family background? Rashi explains that God here was responding to the people's murmurings about Pinhas after he killed the two violators. The people said, "This man killed two people? Who does he think he is?" Pinhas' maternal grandfather was Yitro, who, before his conversion to Judaism, was a pagan priest who brought sacrifices to foreign deities. The people thus deemed Pinhas unworthy of such a holy act of zealotry. Essentially, they were saying, "Look who is so religious all of a sudden! He comes from a pagan background – and he's now going around killing sinners?! Since when did he become Mr. Righteous?" God therefore reminded the people that Pinhas was also a grandson of Aharon, a son of the Kohen Gadol, Elazar, and was indeed worthy of such an act.

When we reflect upon the people's reaction, it seems ludicrous. No fewer than 24,000 perished during the plague. People were dying by the thousands, and as soon as Pinhas thrust his dagger into the two sinners, the plague came to a halt. Logically, the nation should have all rushed to congratulate Pinhas, to wish him "Hazak U'baruch." He ended the plague – what were they complaining about? How could they object?

There is an important lesson to be learned from this episode. People who feel insecure about themselves and their achievements have difficulty accepting the success and achievements of others. When they see their peers accomplishing great things, they are driven to dismiss those accomplishments, to find fault, to insist that they could have done it better. Pinhas' heroism made many people feel uneasy and insecure about themselves. And they sought to assuage these uncomfortable feelings by dismissing Pinhas as a violent hypocrite. They accused him of engaging in wanton bloodshed rather than genuinely standing up for God's honor.

We need to have a good deal of backbone when we set out to accomplish great things, because there will be plenty of people ready to tell us that we are unworthy. It sometimes happens that after I deliver a Derasha (lecture) about a sensitive topic, I receive feedback to the effect of, "What you said is right, Rabbi, but you're not the one to say it." I take solace in the knowledge that if it happened to Pinhas, then it can happen to me – and anyone else – as well. Important work will always make some people uneasy and invite their criticism. But we must remain

steadfast in our conviction and pursue our high goals despite the murmurings and protests of our detractors. Criticism is to be expected when we take on difficult and important challenges, and we must learn from Pinhas to remain true to our goals regardless of the hostility it invites.

Rabbi Wein GOING SHOPPING

Those who know me will testify that I am not a person who enjoys shopping. There are people who simply love to go shopping. In fact there is an entire human activity, bordering on an industry, called "going shopping." And there are many practitioners of this activity and I am not merely speaking of window shopping, which is an entirely different genre by itself, but I am talking about real shopping – going into a megastore and facing the daunting challenge of choices.

My wife has been homebound for the past few weeks, recovering, thank God, from a hip replacement, so the burden of shopping has fallen upon my frail shoulders. I pretty much restrict my forays to food markets and pharmacies. But even there, I am almost always overwhelmed by the variety of goods that are available for purchase.

Since I am not an expert, I am certain that I always take the wrong item, and the wrong brand at the wrong price. Now that is truly a hapless feeling but in writing these essays I have always attempted to be honest about myself and about others. So a hapless feeling it is. There are simply too many choices, too many brands of the same item to allow one to have a feeling of comfort and assurance after completing one's purchase.

In the words of the great rabbis: "You have bestowed upon us such an overabundance of good that we are unable to absorb it." And there is always that "special" lurking at the checkout counter, something you know you didn't need and had no intention in buying when you walked into the store that somehow now seems irresistible. Shopping is truly a harrowing experience. I know of no one who leaves a store fully satisfied and completely content with the purchases of the day.

Somehow I see in the challenge of shopping a metaphor for life generally. We are faced with a myriad of choices daily. We hardly take notice of those that we consider to be only of minor importance or habitual in our behavior pattern. But when it comes to major choices in life, we certainly agonize over them.

Some choices console us that whatever we do will turn out right in any event. Other choices depress us since we realize that whatever we choose is not really beneficial to our physical, moral and spiritual well-being. The great rabbis have taught us that we should choose that which is least harmful and that which is most beneficial.

The rub in that is that many times we are unaware of the consequences that may flow from those choices and we are unable to judge what is the least harmful or most beneficial. I know rabbinic friends of mine who regret having turned down a certain unique position and I know others who regret having accepted a certain rabbinic position. And that regret unfortunately lasts a lifetime and colors one's view of the profession and of the people that one will encounter due to that decision.

Now I realize that this is a far more consequential and more difficult choice than buying the wrong brand of coffee. Nevertheless, the feelings of frustration and angst regarding doubtful choices, whether major or minor, are fairly similar. We are always haunted by the fact that we, most likely, have made some bad choices in our lifetime.

The great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was offered fateful and historic choices by the then general and future emperor of Rome, Vespasian. By choosing to save the scholars and yeshiva of Yavneh, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai guaranteed the survival of Torah and of the Jewish people for the ages. Yet the Talmud relates to us that when this great rabbinical personage lay on his deathbed, he expressed doubt as to whether he merited immortal life.

The great men of the Mussar movement of nineteenth century Lithuania derived from this that one must live one's life according to the choices that one has made but that rarely if ever is one truly certain that one has made the right choices. Throughout our lives we are always going shopping, facing numerous choices but always having to pay for those choices at the ultimate checkout counter of life.

Thus, many like me may attempt to avoid going shopping, but all of us are, in the long run, the customers who make the final choices that govern not only our eating habits, clothing and other goods and services but also the ultimate and definitive choices that govern our lives.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Elijah and the Still, Small Voice

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'Why are you here, Elijah?' He replied, I am moved by the zeal for the Lord, God of Hosts..." The Lord said to him, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire – a still, small voice. (I Kings 19:9-12)

In 1165, an agonizing question confronted Moroccan Jewry. A fanatical Muslim sect, the Almohads, had seized power and were embarked on a policy of forced conversion to Islam. The Jewish community was faced with a choice: to affirm Islamic faith or die.

Some chose martyrdom. Others chose exile. But some acceded to terror and embraced another faith. Inwardly, though, they remained Jews and practiced Judaism in secret. They were the conversos, or as the Spanish were later to call them, the marranos.

To other Jews, they posed a formidable moral problem. How were they to be viewed? Outwardly, they had betrayed their community and their religious heritage. Besides, their example was demoralizing. It weakened the resolve of Jews who were determined to resist, come what may. Yet many of the conversos still wished to remain Jewish, secretly fulfill the commandments and when they could, attend the synagogue and pray.

One of them addressed this question to a rabbi. He had, he said, converted under coercion, but he remained at heart a faithful Jew. Could he obtain merit by observing in private as many of the Torah's precepts as possible? Was there, in other words, hope left for him as a Jew?

The rabbi's reply was emphatic. A Jew who had embraced Islam had forfeited membership in the Jewish community. He was no longer part of the house of Israel. For such a person to fulfill the commandments was meaningless. Worse, it was a sin. The choice was stark and absolute: to be or not to be a Jew. If you choose to be a Jew, you should be prepared to suffer death rather than compromise. If you choose not to be a Jew, then you must not seek to re-enter the house you had deserted.

We can respect the firmness of the rabbi's stance. He

set out, without equivocation, the moral choice. There are times when heroism is, for faith, a categorical imperative. Nothing less will do. His reply, though harsh, is not without courage. But another rabbi disagreed.

The name of the first rabbi is lost to us, but that of the second is not. He was Moses Maimonides, the greatest rabbi of the Middle Ages. Maimonides was no stranger to religious persecution. Born in Cordova in 1135, he had been forced to leave, along with his family, some thirteen years later when the city fell to the Almohads. Twelve years were spent in wandering. In 1160, a temporary liberalization of Almohad rule allowed the family to settle in Morocco. Within five years he was forced to move again, settling first in the land of Israel and ultimately in Egypt.

Maimonides was so incensed by the rabbi's reply to the forced convert that he wrote a response of his own. In it, he frankly disassociates himself from the earlier ruling and castigates its author whom he describes as a 'self-styled sage who has never experienced what so many Jewish communities had to endure in the way of persecution'.

Maimonides' reply, the Iggeret ha-Shemad ('Epistle on Forced Conversion'), is a substantial treatise in its own right. [1] What is striking, given the vehemence with which it begins, is that its conclusions are hardly less demanding than those of the earlier response. If you are faced with religious persecution, says Maimonides, you must leave and settle elsewhere. 'If he is compelled to violate even one precept it is forbidden to stay there. He must leave everything he has and travel day and night until he finds a spot where he can practice his religion.' This is preferable to martyrdom.

None the less, one who chooses to go to his death rather than renounce his faith 'has done what is good and proper' for he has given his life for the sanctity of God. What is unacceptable is to stay and excuse oneself on the grounds that if one sins, one does so only under pressure. To do this is to profane God's name, 'not exactly willingly, but almost so'.

These are Maimonides' conclusions. But surrounding them and constituting the main thrust of his argument is a sustained defense of those who had done precisely what Maimonides had ruled they should not do. The letter gives conversos hope.

They have done wrong. But it is a forgivable wrong. They acted under coercion and the fear of death. They remain Jews. The acts they do as Jews still win

favour in the eyes of God. Indeed doubly so, for when they fulfill a commandment it cannot be to win favour of the eyes of others. They know that when they act as Jews they risk discovery and death. Their secret adherence has a heroism of its own.

What was wrong in the first rabbi's ruling was his insistence that a Jew who yields to terror has forsaken his faith and is to be excluded from the community. Maimonides insists that it is not so. 'It is not right to alienate, scorn and hate people who desecrate the Sabbath. It is our duty to befriend them and encourage them to fulfill the commandments.' In a daring stroke of interpretation, he quotes the verse: 'Do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving' (Proverbs 6:30). The conversos who come to the synagogue are hungry for Jewish prayer. They 'steal' moments of belonging. They should not be despised, but welcomed.

This Epistle is a masterly example of that most difficult of moral challenges: to combine prescription and compassion. Maimonides leaves us in no doubt as to what he believes Jews should do. But at the same time he is uncompromising in his defense of those who fail to do it. He does not endorse what they have done. But he defends who they are. He asks us to understand their situation. He gives them grounds for self-respect. He holds the doors of the community open.

The argument reaches a climax as Maimonides quotes a remarkable sequence of midrashic passages whose theme is that prophets must not condemn their people, but rather defend them before God.

When Moses, charged with leading the people out of Egypt, replied, 'But they will not believe me' (Exodus 4:1), ostensibly he was justified. The subsequent biblical narrative suggests that Moses' doubts were well founded. The Israelites were a difficult people to lead. But the midrash says that God replied to Moses, 'They are believers and the children of believers, but you [Moses] will ultimately not believe.'^[2]

Maimonides cites a series of similar passages and then says: If this is the punishment meted out to the pillars of the universe, the greatest of the prophets, because they briefly criticized the people – even though they were guilty of the sins of which they were accused – can we envisage the punishment awaiting those who criticize the conversos, who under threat of death and without abandoning their faith, confessed to another religion in which they did not believe?

In the course of his analysis, Maimonides turns to the prophet Elijah and the text that forms this week's haftarah. Under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal worship had become the official cult. God's prophets were being killed. Those who survived were in hiding. Elijah responded by issuing a public challenge at Mount Carmel. Facing four hundred of Baal's representatives, he was determined to settle the question of religious truth once and for all.

He told the assembled people to choose one way or another: for God or for Baal. They must no longer 'halt between two opinions'. Truth was about to be decided by a test. If it lay with Baal, fire would consume the offering prepared by its priests. If it lay with God, fire would descend to Elijah's offering.

Elijah won the confrontation. The people cried out, 'The Lord, He is God.' The priests of Baal were routed. But the story does not end there. Jezebel issued a warrant for his death. Elijah escapes to Mount Horeb. There he receives a strange vision. He witnesses a whirlwind, then an earthquake, then a fire. But he is led to understand that God was not in these things. Then God speaks to him in a 'still, small voice', and tells him to appoint Elisha as his successor.

The episode is enigmatic. It is made all the more so by a strange feature of the text. Immediately before the vision, God asks, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' and Elijah replies, 'I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts....' (I Kings 9:9-10). Immediately after the vision, God asks the same question, and Elijah gives the same answer (I Kings 19:13-14). The midrash turns the text into a dialogue:

Elijah: The Israelites have broken God's covenant
God: Is it then your covenant?

Elijah: They have torn down Your altars.

God: But were they your altars?

Elijah: They have put Your prophets to the sword.

God: But you are alive.

Elijah: I alone am left.

God: Instead of hurling accusations against Israel, should you not have pleaded their cause?^[3]

The meaning of the midrash is clear. The zealot takes the part of God. But God expects His prophets to be defenders, not accusers.

The repeated question and answer is now to be understood in its tragic depth. Elijah declares himself to be zealous for God. He is shown that God is not disclosed in dramatic confrontation: not in the whirlwind or the earthquake or the fire. God now asks

him again, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Elijah repeats that he is zealous for God. He has not understood that religious leadership calls for another kind of virtue, the way of the still, small voice. God now indicates that someone else must lead. Elijah must hand his mantle on to Elisha.

In turbulent times, there is an almost overwhelming temptation for religious leaders to be confrontational. Not only must truth be proclaimed but falsehood must be denounced. Choices must be set out as stark divisions. Not to condemn is to condone. The rabbi who condemned the conversos had faith in his heart, logic on his side and Elijah as his precedent.

But the midrash and Maimonides set before us another model. A prophet hears not one imperative but two: guidance and compassion, a love of truth and an abiding solidarity with those for whom that truth has become eclipsed. To preserve tradition and at the same time defend those others condemn is the difficult, necessary task of religious leadership in an unreligious age.

[1] An English translation and commentary is contained in Abraham S. Halkin, and David Hartman. *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985.

[2] Shabbat 97a.

[3] Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 1: 6.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

What is the message that is proclaimed by the Shabbat offerings?

Three gigantic principles are being enunciated.

1) The Universe was created from Nothing. "By the Word of Hashem the heavens were made; and all their host by the breath of His mouth" (Tehillim 33:6). "For He spoke, and it became; He commanded, and it arose" (ibid. 33:9). Forever Hashem, does Your Word stand in the heavens" (ibid. 119:89). "You established the world and it stands" (ibid. 119:90). The word "Hashem means "Being" and also "Causing Being". He alone has intrinsic existence ("Being"), and all that exists has come into being and remains in being, because of His Will. Thus all of what we call Reality is solely His Will.

2) "The world is built with Kindliness" (ibid. 89:3). Every phenomenon: every object and every process are intended for kindly purpose. "For His kindness is everlasting" (ibid. 118:1), not only in the sense that the processes of the world continue to function forever with the same purpose of benevolence for life in this world; but the phenomena of the world, if

utilized properly by the holy nation, cause the eventual happiness of the Afterlife, which is forever.

3) "Between Me and the sons of Israel it is a sign forever, that in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth" (Shemot 31:7). The message of Shabbat proclaims that this superlative privilege of serving as agents in the promulgation of Hashem as the Creator: is given solely to the sons of Israel. No other nation (or creed) is permitted to assume the dignity of this function, and therefore cannot be justified in declaring a Shabbat, whether on the seventh day or any other day of the week. "The Kingdom of Cohanim, and the holy people" (Shemot 19:6) are elected by Hashem for this function.

The Mussaf-offerings of Shabbat come to remind us of these three principles. Even today, when we are unable to bring these offerings, we are still expected to proclaim these outstanding lessons of the Shabbat.

- How can we remember/think about these great ideas during the week?

Rav Miller ZT"L taught us at a Vaad.

During the week we keep Shabbat on our minds by thinking about the following three Principles which correspond to the three Shabbat Principles.

.1. Hashem created the world from nothing

1. Every day spend one minute looking at anything in the world and Think that the World is nothing but the 'word of Hashem.' (Hashem created the world from nothing-Shabbat)

2. Hashem created the world for Kindliness

2. Before saying the 'Modim' prayer prepare yourself and think about something specific which you are thanking Hashem for. (Hashem created the world for Kindliness-Shabbat)

3. Shabbat is a covenant between Hashem and His Chosen People.

3. When you put on Tefillin, Think that we are chosen by Hashem to be his witnesses.

(A covenant between Hashem and His Chosen People-Shabbat)

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