

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

MATOT-MAS'EI

JULY 18, 2015 2 AB 5775
Happy Birthday Amalya, Happy Birthday Ellen

DEDICATIONS: For a Refuah Shelemah for Simcha bat Sara

Rosh Hodesh Ab will be celebrated tonight and tomorrow - 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 8:05 PM

Shabbat

Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM – Latest Shema 8:283AM
Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30
Rabbi David is scheduled to give the derasha

THERE IS NO KIDDUSH THIS WEEK

We had no sponsor and we wanted to avoid problems with the social hall
WE WILL HAVE SEUDA SHELISHI

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
Birkat HaMazon 8:45PM Arbit 8:50 PM – Shabbat Ends at 9:04

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday 8:00AM
Monday, Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM
Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:45 PM

LOOKING FORWARD:

The fast of Tisha Be'Av is pushed from Saturday July 25th to Sunday July 26th
Next Shabbat we have a Kiddush celebrating the 100th Birthday of Mr Golden – Abal 120 Happy and Healthy
After Lunch we will have a class and pray Mincha at 1:25 – Amidah not before 1:37
The Fast begins at 8:17. Shabbat ends at 9:00PM, Arbit Tisha Be'Ab at 9:15PM

The Shabbat after is Shabbat Nachamu
Saturday August 1st
We will be having a Shabbaton with the Carlebach Synagogue
Rabbi Naftali Citron will be with us
We will have a Friday night dinner and a special Motzei Shabbat program

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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

This Friday is Rosh Hodesh Av. It is the day my grandmother Victoria Bat Rosa, Victoria Gindi, passed away. I was going to write about the day being the day Aharon HaKohen died and coincidentally the day, our grandmother, sito, the daughter of Kohanim, the wife of a Kohen and the mother of Kohanim left the world. I recalled an article I wrote some years back and re-read it and decided to reprint it below. Additionally I would love to remind every child out there to take the time and sit with your grandparents and interview them, take out your iphones and record them. They think you don't want to hear the stories, but believe me, one day you will be grateful if you do and you will regret if you don't. With the dozens of hours the Sephardic Heritage Foundation has of my dad on video, with all his writings, with an Artscroll book coming out based for the most part on his narrative and with all the time all of us spent together, the day after he passed away, we regretted everything we didn't know and forgot to ask. Even the community historian and archivist Shlomo Dayan who my father bequeathed to so much of his link to our past tells me a day doesn't go by where he is haunted by the fact that he didn't ask Joe Bibi this or that.

My grandmother lived some sort of mythical life. What a book it would have made? What a tale to pass to the next generations. She was to us the real Snow White. She was born the beautiful daughter of a wealthy banker and was raised in Beirut. They went north for the summers where they lived in what was to us an almost mythical castle on the sea shore of Tripoli. Aunt Sally Azrak had photos she showed us. Sito's mother died when she was very young and we imagined the evil stepmother moved in. Sito was sent away to a convent where she studied. We wondered who would send a Jewish child to the nuns? What an evil stepmother she must have had. It was only recently that I learned that as an alternative to the Alliance schools which the rabbinate was so against, some of those who wanted their daughters educated sent them to the convent where special arrangements were made. So maybe the stepmother whoever she was, wasn't that evil. In a world where few women could read, Sito was fluent in French,

English, Latin and Arabic. (In America she was the neighborhood letter reader and writer helping others to communicate with relatives in the old country). At some point we imagined she ran away from home meeting and falling in love with the tall, dark and handsome David Gindi from Aleppo. They married and David perhaps after seeing his brother Moshe who would become one of the communities leading sages, Haham Moshe Gindi, haKohen return from America with a veritable fortune decided to try his luck in the Golden Medina. (His other brothers were Isaac and Ezra Gindi and a fifth brother remained in Syria with his family only leaving in the late eighties). Leaving Sito behind with aunt Sally, uncle Jack and aunt Rose, he came to America where he was taken in by his cousin Aharon Gindi who was a partner of Isaac Shalom. (It seems that the descendants of the two Syrian-American Gindi families, those of Aharon Gindi, HaKohen and those of Jacob Gindi, HaKohen are certainly cousins even though I have often heard them say they were not sure). Aunt Sally told us that they moved into the castle in Tripoli while awaiting word from their dad in America. Eventually they set sail for America with a treasure of gold coins Sito's father gave them and which were hidden in the watermelon she carried. Over the next decade of the roaring twenties Jido (grandpa), successful as a textile peddler and salesman amassed a small real estate empire. When the depression hit, he thought he would be protected because his tenants were banks. But that wasn't to be and the story we were told was that the night his little empire crashed, Sito's hair turned from jet black to pure white. I am not sure how much of those tales are true, fantasy or simply exaggeration. Certainly it is the stuff of a great book or movie!

The one thing I can tell you is that Sito had this simple yet special faith. When she placed her hand on the mezuzah at the end of Shabbat and prayed for a blessed and successful week to come, her connection with Heaven could be felt. When she blessed you with Ah-lah Maak – G-d be with you, you felt blessed.

From July 2009 Archives - Today was Rosh Chodesh Av. My cousin Morris invited my brother Ruby, Jonah and me to meet Rabbi Berel Wein whose Destiny Foundation was sponsoring lectures on the topic of Jewish Resilience featuring the Rabbi along with my dear friend Rabbi Paysach Krohn and Rabbi Yosef Viener at The Park East Synagogue. We are all big fans of Rabbi Wein and it was funny when the four of us walked in amidst the sea of black hats and he greeted us by shouting, "Ah, finally the real Jews" - I think that was a reference to the Sephardim or Rabbi Wein's theory that the name Sutton (my cousin

Morris) is really an extension of the abbreviation for Sephardi Tahor - or pure Sephardi.

Rabbi Wein is about as quick with a comment as anyone I've ever met. (My friend Rabbi Sam Klibanoff of the Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach - Rabbi Wein's student - is a very close second having learned from the master.) Rabbi Wein also has this way of drawing one in even when that person has heard the stories already again and again. As we were leaving he commented on the fact this Newsletter, which has consistently featured the Rabbi's articles is up to 18,000 subscribers. I told him we were trying to get him out to as many "real Jews" as the Jerusalem Post and he said we already passed them a while ago.

One of the concepts that was presented this evening was drawing your friends closer to Hashem. We often focus on bringing back those who are far away - the kiruv movement, but what about letting those who are close get closer. Inviting a friend to a class, setting up a learning partnership or it could be as simple as subscribing them to this newsletter. We have been doing this for about 15 years and its heart warming to know how many people look forward to it. For many its their connection to Torah. I get a kick out of my mom telling me about her friends all demanding their written copies. It's the Torah fix of the week.

On the way back from Park East we mentioned how nice it was that we did this together today as Rosh Chodesh Av is the yahrzeit of our grandmother Victoria Gindi. My brother Ruby told us that everyone was sure she would pass away the day before, but a bit miraculously her grandchildren's reading of Tehilim kept her with us another day.

Was there something significant in delaying until Rosh Chodesh Av? We know of only one yahrzeit mentioned in the Torah. In Parshat Masei, we are informed about the death of Aharon Hakohen taking place on the 1st day of the 5th month - Rosh Chodesh Av. The Rabbis teach us that the accompanying display of mourning surpassed even that of Moses. Aharon merited this outpouring of grief because of his role as the lover of peace and the pursuer of peace as it says, "ohev shalom v'rodef shalom".

The Rabbis also teach us that the Annaney HaKodesh - The Holy Clouds - accompanied the Jewish people in the desert for 39 years in the merit of Aaron. With his death, the clouds lifted.

The end of the book of Exodus tells how the Jewish people were able to perceive G-d's presence in the

cloud, so that the lifting or the removal of the cloud on Rosh Chodesh Av may signify a perceived removal of Hashem from the people.

Is this the reason we reduce our joy when Av arrives?

There is something more to the cloud that surrounded us in the desert. It envelops the people and protects them. In many ways it's a roof that binds the nation within a single structure. Fitting, it existed in Aaron's merit whose goal was always to bring people together with each other and with G-d. It seems that if Moses played the role of father of the nation, it was Aaron who took on the role of mother. As such, it is often the mother who keeps the family together.

How apropos then that Sito's yahrzeit falls on the same day as Aaron her ancestor. My grandmother Victoria Gindi, was a Bat Kohen - the daughter of a Kohen, eshet Kohen - the wife of a kohen and ehm kohanim - the mother of kohanim. She, like all of our wives, mothers, and grandmothers was the glue that kept the family together. The surrounding cloud that signified G-d's palatable presence around us. As we learn when Isaac brings Rebecca into the tent of his mother, its the woman who brings the Shehinah down.

I was asked on Shabbat why we don't commemorate the one yahrzeit listed in the Torah, that of Aharon the high priest. I really have no answer yet, but am hoping one of you will write in and tell me. (I've been asking people all week). But perhaps we do in how we go into the nine days with additional stringencies or maybe the whole problem is that we don't commemorate it. Maybe our job is so simple After all we are told that the destruction occurred because of the sin of baseless hatred bringing down the temple and sending the Shehinah into hiding. Aaron died and the cloud lifted.

So to bring back the cloud, to bring back the Shehinah, to invite Hashem's palatable presence back, we need to become Aaron. We need to become our grandmothers.

"Ohev shalom v'rodef shalom". Each of us needs to take on the role of lover of peace and pursuer of peace. Each of us needs to take on the role of binding glue. We need to put every effort into bringing people together - into mediating difference and ending the hatred. We need to put every effort forth into bridging the gap between people and their father in heaven. After all we are a nation of priests. And the Shehinah is not gone. It's just watching from the next room. It's up to us to open the door.

Shabbat Shalom,.

David Bibi

**Why They're Cheering in Tehran
The nuclear deal is an opaque 159 pages, offering
sanctions relief and vague promises of
inspections.**

By FREDERICK KAGAN

The nuclear agreement with Iran announced Tuesday is an astoundingly good deal, far surpassing the hopes of anyone . . . in Tehran. It requires Iran to reduce the number of centrifuges enriching uranium by about half, to sell most of its current uranium stockpile or "downblend" it to lower levels of enrichment, and to accept inspections (whose precise nature is yet to be specified) by the International Atomic Energy Agency, something that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had wanted to avoid. But the agreement also permits Iran to phase out the first-generation centrifuges on which it now relies and focus its research and development by exclusively using a number of advanced centrifuge models many times more efficient, which has been Tehran's plan all along. The deal will also entirely end the United Nations' involvement in Iran's nuclear program in 10 years, and in 15 years will lift most restrictions on the program.

Even that, though, is not Tehran's biggest win. The main achievement of the regime's negotiators is striking a deal that commits the West to removing almost all sanctions on Iran, including most of those imposed to reduce terrorism or to prevent weapons proliferation. Most of the sanctions are likely to end in a few months. Thus the agreement ensures that after a short delay Iran will be able to lay the groundwork for a large nuclear arsenal and, in the interim, expand its conventional military capabilities as much as the regime pleases. The supreme leader should be very proud of his team.

The agreement consists of 159 pages of opaque prose, and key sections are referred to but are not clearly marked. Even figuring out the timeline embodied in the deal is hard, but it appears to run about as follows:

"Finalization Day" was July 14. The agreement stipulates that a resolution will be submitted to the United Nations Security Council "promptly after the conclusion of the negotiations . . . for adoption without delay" that will "terminate" all preceding U.N. Security Council resolutions against Iran. The document doesn't mention the 60-day window for review by the U.S. Congress, and the language in

this section suggests that action in the U.N. will not await any congressional vote.

"Adoption Day" is the next major milestone, coming either 90 days after the approval of the Security Council resolution or "at an earlier date by mutual consent." If the Security Council moves smartly, Adoption Day could come in October. At that point Iran commits to apply the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which governs enhanced international inspections. But this commitment is provisional, "pending ratification by the Majlis"—the Iranian parliament. It is again noteworthy that no mention is made of any action to be taken by the U.S. Congress, despite the nod to Iran's legislature.

Determining when "Implementation Day" happens is even more difficult, since it depends on the completion of a series of negotiations between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency. The timeline for those negotiations, however, is spelled out in a separate document: Discussions are to be complete by Oct. 15, 2015, and the IAEA director general will submit a final report to his board of governors by Dec. 15.

Iran at this point will be rewarded. The European Union will end a large number sanctions; President Obama will issue waivers for a number of U.S. sanctions or rescind the executive orders that imposed them. Iranian banks will be allowed back into the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications system, or Swift, allowing Iran to reintegrate into the dollar economy and move money freely.

The agreement also specifies that the EU will lift sanctions against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; the Quds Force and possibly its commander, Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani; and a large number of other individuals and entities sanctioned not simply for their roles in the nuclear program but for terrorism and human-rights abuses. This sanctions relief will come by 2023 at the latest. The agreement does not appear to oblige the U.S. to lift sanctions on those people and entities.

The survival of the international arms embargo against Iran, however, depends entirely on the U.N. Security Council resolution passed to implement this agreement. Nothing in the text of the agreement itself supports President Obama's assertion that the embargo will last for another five years, although he may have that time frame in mind.

The current embargo was implemented by two resolutions: No. 1696 (2006) and No. 1929 (2010). The first bars the sale or transfer to Iran of any material or technology that might be useful to a ballistic-missile program, and the second does the same for "battle tanks, armored combat vehicles,

large caliber artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles, or missile systems.” A new resolution that simply terminates all of the previous sanctions would allow Russia and China to provide Iran with any military technology they choose. To preserve the embargo, the U.S. would need to add the appropriate language to the resolution that must be passed by the Security Council this summer. But that means getting agreement from the Russians, who have already said that the embargo should be ended immediately. The U.S. is not in a very strong position to engage the Russians on this point, since the Obama administration must get the resolution through the Security Council quickly or risk having the entire nuclear deal fall apart. Experts will debate the value of the concessions Iran has made on the nuclear front, but the value to Iran of the concessions the U.S. has made on nonnuclear issues is immeasurable. It is hard to imagine any other circumstance under which Tehran could have hoped to get an international, U.N. Security Council-backed commitment to remove the Republican Guard and Quds Force from any sanctions list, or to have the fate of the arms embargo placed in the hands of Vladimir Putin.

It is still more remarkable that the agreement says nothing about Iran’s terrorist activities, human-rights violations or role in regional weapons proliferation—all of which were drivers of the embargo in the first place. Iran makes no commitment to change its terrorist or oppressive ways, but the international community promises to eliminate those sanctions anyway.

Nor is there much mystery about what Iran will do with these concessions. Tehran has recently concluded an agreement giving Syria’s Bashar Assad a \$1 billion line of credit. The Iranian regime has announced that it is preparing to take delivery of the Russian S-300 anti-aircraft missile system. The supreme leader has released a five-year economic plan calling for a significant expansion of Iran’s ballistic-missile and cyberwar programs and an increase in Iran’s defense capabilities.

The Obama administration seems to be betting that lifting sanctions will cause Iran to moderate its behavior in both nuclear and nonnuclear matters. The rhetoric and actions of the regime’s leaders provide little evidence to support this notion and much evidence to the contrary. The likelihood is, therefore, that this agreement will lead to a significant expansion in the capabilities of the Iranian military, including the Republican Guard and the Quds Force. It comes just as Iran is straining to keep Bashar Assad in power, dominate the portions of Iraq not controlled by Islamic State and help the Houthis fight Saudi Arabia in Yemen. That makes it a very good deal for Iran.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading

Matot - Benei Israel conquer Midyan and prepare to enter Israel (year 40)

- 1- The laws of oaths and vows and how they can be nullified
- 2- Benei Israel takes revenge killing all the men of Midyan
- 3- Moshe says to also kill the women and male children. Laws of koshering kelim (that we’re taken from Midyan as spoils).
- 4- The spoils of the war are divided up - What the soldiers and Elazar received
- 5- The spoils of the war are divided up - What the rest of Benei Israel and Leviim received. The soldiers bring a korban and gold as thanks for their success in the war.
- 6- Gad and Reuben ask Moshe to have their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan.
- 7- Gad and Reuben agree to come conquer Israel with the other tribes and Moshe gives them the land

Masei - A recap of Benei Israel's jounries, Israel is divided among Benei Israel (yr 40)

- 1- Benei Israel's first 7 travels from Mitsrayim to Israel (all took place before Matan Torah)
- 2- Travels 8-42 to Eretz Israel.
- 3- The boundaries of Eretz Israel are given.
- 4- Leaders are appointed to take possession of the land for each tribe
- 5- Benei Israel are told of the land they must set aside for the Leviim (who did not receive land)
- 6- Cities of refuge are set aside. Laws are given for one who kills by mistake or intentionally.
- 7- Menashe expresses concern that Shaphchad's land will be lost to other tribes if his daughters marry out of their tribe

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“And they approached Moshe and said, ‘Enclosures for the flock we shall build here for our livestock and cities for our children.’”(Bamidbar 32:16)

The tribe of Gad and Reuben and half the tribe of Menashe wanted land on the east bank of the Jordan. Rashi says, “They were concerned for their property more than they were for their sons and daughters, for they put mention of their livestock ahead of their children. Moshe said to them, this is not right. Make that which is essential essential and that which is secondary secondary. First build cities

for your children and afterwards, enclosures for your flocks."

Of course the question is glaring. Could it be that men of such great stature would be more concerned about their money than their children? We can answer this with another question (like all Jews answer questions with another question) that is asked in the book Torah Ladaat.

I'm sure many of you have attended a Pidyon Haben. The Kohen asks the father an incredible question, "What do you prefer, your son or the five silver coins?" What kind of father in his right mind would say, "I prefer the coins." Plus, it says in Shulhan Aruch (Yoreh Deah chapter 305) that even if the father would want to give the child to the Kohen and would say so, it wouldn't help.

The true meaning of the question is, "What do you prefer in your heart?" Of course every person would say he prefers the child, but is that just your mind controlling your heart, but deep down there is a desire for the money? Or is it that you have no desire at all for the money and you give the money with a full heart? This is a very special time to ask this question because a Kohen is really a teacher who can truly guide this child in the right manner, and help him grow up to be a righteous Jew. But, now the father wants to be the guiding light for this child. Therefore, the Kohen must determine at this juncture, is the father a good candidate for this important job?

Many times a person is not sure of his feelings inside. A person might think he is not interested in the monetary aspect of things but deep down he is. The tribes that came to Moshe were very much in tune with their inner feelings, and that was their greatness. They were lofty enough to admit their true feelings to Moshe, and Moshe taught them that they must overcome this to obtain true greatness.

May we attain the level where monetary gain no longer prevents us from doing the right things. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"When a person makes a vow to Hashem."
(Bemidbar 30:3)

When do people most frequently make a vow or an oath? When they become angry. Out of anger, they swear that they will or will not do something, or that something should be forbidden to them. But anger is not the proper motivation for a vow or an oath. Rather, the vow should be "to Hashem." That is, if a person sees that his negative impulses might lead him to transgress, then out of a calculated, willful decision, it is permitted to make a vow or oath that will motivate him to refrain from transgressing. In general, however, one should abstain from making any vows or oaths. Indeed, even when one gives

charity, one should get accustomed to say, "Beli neder - without a vow."

The same actions can be done with various motivations. Depending on your motivation, the act will either be a manifestation of a loss of control or an elevated act of self discipline. When you impulsively do or say things out of anger you are the servant of your temper. On the other hand, when you decide that doing something can be spiritually harmful for you, and therefore you are willing to set up self-restraints, you are becoming the master over your impulses. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

WHO AM I?

"Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterwards you will be gathered unto your people." (Bemidbar 31:2)

Rashi points out that, despite being told that he would be taken from this world as soon as he had finished battling Midian, Moshe unhesitatingly assembled the army to fight the Midianites, fulfilling Hashem's will with joy and without delay. Even though Moshe could have delayed the war and prolonged his life by many years, he put the needs of the Jewish People first and saw their advancement into Eress Yisrael as the best thing for them. This act of selflessness epitomizes Moshe's relationship with the Jewish People. As the Torah later relates, Moshe never cared for his own needs. Rather, he was solely focused on the role that Hashem gave him – to lead and care for the Jewish People.

This character trait is only found in the great leaders of the Jewish People, as we see from Rav Shimon Shkop's answer to a question about the most important quality for someone to have who wants to become a "Gadol Hador – a leader of the generation." He answered that everybody identifies themselves as an "I" – with one's own needs at the forefront of his mind. For some people, explained Rav Shimon, included in that "I" is their wife and children. For others who are greater still, "I" includes their friends and neighbors. There are some even greater people whose "I" extends to their entire community; but the "I" of a Gadol Hador, concluded Rav Shimon, includes the entire Jewish People. (Short Vort)

CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

The children were not bored, even though they were stuck indoors on a rainy day. They whiled away the afternoon playing "dress up" with clothing they found stashed in cartons in the storage closet.

Leon put on a policeman's cap that uncle Dan used to wear before he retired from the city's police force. Mimicking the motions of an officer he had seen directing traffic, Leon began "directing" the

other children to advance or stop. Mimi walked across the room with measured steps, head held high, in a silky gown Mom had once worn to an aunt's wedding. Even little David – usually silly and playful – looked serious and stern as he sat at a table in Dad's hat and tie, pretending to be the "boss" of many employees. All the children were transformed, behaving as they thought people wearing those clothes would act.

"Clothes make the man." I don't know who said it first, but it has become a cliché. Although we are taught not to be fooled by external trappings and to esteem the inner values and the spiritual makeup of friends and neighbors, there is still some truth to the importance of clothing.

The Torah expects us Jews to dress in new, fine clothing on our holy days as part of the celebration of the occasion. Shabbat clothing is supposed to be of higher quality than weekday garb, and unique to the holiness of the day. And we would not dream of going to a wedding ceremony in shorts and a tee shirt for fear of being ridiculed by all the other attendees.

What someone wears may also indicate function or status in society. Uniforms of all types are worn to identify a person's job, and members of royalty wear special garb to demonstrate their lofty status.

How people dress certainly has an effect on how they behave. Society at large has gone casual. Loose-fitting, soft clothing is certainly comfortable, but, somehow, the casual look makes for an all-too-casual personality. Laxity in observance of proper manners, lack of respect for others, and a decline in the observance of moral guidelines may not be caused exclusively by revealing clothing. However, clothes do affect the wearer in conscious and subconscious ways that determine not only behavior, but also moral decisions and attitudes.

Clothes may or may not make the man, but they certainly do affect behavior. Be smart. Dress "up"! (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR **Following the Example of Aharon Ha'kohen**

The Torah in Parashat Maseh briefly mentions the death of Aharon Ha'kohen, noting that he passed away on Rosh Hodesh Ab – a day which always falls around the time of the Shabbat when we read Parashat Maseh.

The Mishna in Masechet Abot instructs us to "be among the students of Aharon Ha'kohen, who loved peace, pursued peace, loved people, and drew them close to Torah." Aharon distinguished himself specifically in the area of peaceful relations among

people. It is therefore appropriate that we read about his passing during this period of year, when we mourn the destruction of the Bet Ha'mikdash, which was the result of Sin'at Hinam (hatred among Jews). Aharon represents the diametric opposite of Sin'at Hinam, as he pursued peaceful relations with all people, and his example is one which we must follow in order to correct the mistake that caused the Jewish Nation's exile.

However, the Mishna speaks not only of Aharon's devotion to peace, but also of his efforts to bring his fellow Jews closer to Torah observance: "loved people, and drew them close to Torah." The Mishna uses here the word "Beriyot" ("people"), which refers to people on the lowest spiritual levels. The word "Beriya" literally means "creature" – something that was created. A "Beriya" is thus a person whose only achievement is the fact that he was created, who has not accomplished anything more than simply existing. Aharon truly loved even the Beriyot. He was genuinely devoted to all his fellow Jews, and rather than reject or ignore the "Beriyot," he loved them and worked with them in an effort to inspire them to grow.

This quality, too, is something we must try to emulate as we seek to become worthy of the end of the exile and the rebuilding of the Bet Ha'mikdash. The name of this month – "Ab" – is spelled "Alef," "Bet." The word "Alef" means "to teach," and the letter "Bet" represents the word "Bina" –wisdom. After a person learns and acquires knowledge, he bears the responsibility of sharing his knowledge with other people. This must be one of our goals during this period of mourning – to commit ourselves to spreading Hashem's word and positively influencing our fellow Jews. This is the time to redouble efforts to pursue peace, to love all Jews regardless of their religious background, regardless of whether they are more, less, or just as observant as we are, and make every effort possible to inspire and uplift other Jews so they will draw closer to Torah

Rabbi Wein **HUMAN NATURE**

In a rapidly changing world of technology, advances in medicine and ever shifting social mores, there remains one constant in life and that is the unchanging nature of human beings. No matter how clearly the failures of the past are recorded for us, we seem determined to repeat those errors. This is especially and poignantly true when considering that we have now entered the time of contemplation and mourning over the destruction of the Temples and the ensuing exiles, persecutions and tragedies which have been our lot over the past millennia.

Though the Talmud and Jewish tradition described particular sins and reasons for these past debacles, the stark lesson of history is that the weaknesses of human nature continually confound better judgment and wiser choices. The prophets of Israel clearly outlined the coming destruction and for centuries warned the Jewish people of their impending fate if, somehow, they did not overcome their natural inclinations that are so influenced by societal norms, false gods and uninhibited desires.

The Jewish people certainly could not complain that they were not put on notice as to where there behavior, lack of loyalty to God and Torah and wanton sexuality and venality would ultimately lead. Yet the prophets of Israel were in the main ignored, vilified and even persecuted for telling the truth to their people.

Part of the weakness of human nature is to whistle past the graveyard and to ignore unpleasant warnings and impending challenges. Human nature always wishes to kick the can down the road and not face the consequences of reality. It is human nature, even more than the particular sins of Israel; outlined for us by the Talmud and rabbinic tradition that precipitated the disasters that befell us during this period of the yearly calendar.

It is very difficult to break habits and preconceived notions. It takes a concerted effort and consistent exercise of will over desire in order to combat the weaknesses of human behavior. The Torah warns us to be aware of this fact when it stated that the "nature of human beings and of the human heart is intrinsically evil from the moment of birth."

We are all aware that successful parenting requires molding the child's nature to further cooperation, industry, good behavior and manners and to promote a serious and constructive attitude towards life and its challenges. Left to their own devices, most children grow up to be weak in morals and deficient in education and social behavior.

Jewish tradition and spirituality discusses the animal nature – the animal soul, so to speak – that is part of our personality. In effect, the Torah commands that we domesticate ourselves and make our nature more exalted and holy. To do so, we must be aware of past errors and of dire warnings that were ignored or ridiculed. Any study of the book of Melochim and of the writings of the prophets of Israel of First Temple times will surely indicate to us the stubbornness of human nature, even when reality denies the basic assumption that that nature implies.

The Talmud teaches us that the Jewish people worshiped strange gods and adopted paganism, not because they believed in that nonsense but because it allowed them sexual freedoms and removed the obligations of the moral inhibitions of the Torah from their lives. They allowed their nature to overtake them and warp their sense of logic and clear thinking.

Too often in life, human nature trumps common sense and reasoned intelligence. That is the bitter lesson that is most evident to me from the events of these weeks of mourning that we now commemorate.

Much of the folly that surrounds us in world, national and personal affairs, is the product of our nature. We are very complex creatures and are able to mask, even to ourselves, the true motives that lie behind many of the current ideologies, policies and mores that dominate our society. The struggle against the inherent weakness, if not even depravity, of human nature always appears to be a futile one. Yet, the Torah does not allow us to give up in that struggle.

King Solomon noted that "the righteous may fall seven times," but in the end the righteous person rises again to continue the struggle and the quest for meaning and holiness in one's life. The beginning of successful combat against the evil in our personalities lies in the recognition of our nature itself. An identified foe can be overcome and defeated. It is only the vague and unidentified aspect that constantly defeats and frustrates us. I think this concept is worthy of consideration and internalization, especially during this period of the year when we recall those weaknesses of human nature that brought us to our knees.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Retribution and Revenge

Near the end of Bemidbar, we encounter the law of the cities of refuge: three cities to the east of the Jordan and, later, three more within the land of Israel itself. There, people who had committed homicide could flee and find protection until their case was heard by a court of law. If they were found guilty of murder, in biblical times they were sentenced to death. If found innocent – if the death happened by accident or inadvertently, with neither deliberation nor malice – then they were to stay in the city of refuge "until the death of the High priest." There, they were protected against revenge on the part of the goel hadam, the blood-redeemer, usually the closest relative of the person who had been killed.

Homicide is never less than serious in Jewish law.

But there is a fundamental difference between murder – deliberate killing – and manslaughter, accidental death. To kill someone not guilty of murder as an act of revenge for an accidental death is not justice but further bloodshed, and must be prevented. Hence the need for safe havens where people at risk could be protected.

The prevention of unjust violence is fundamental to the Torah. God's covenant with Noah and humankind after the Flood identifies murder as the ultimate crime: "He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God, God created man" (Gen. 9: 6). Blood wrongly shed cries to Heaven itself. God said to Cain after he had murdered Abel, "Your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground" (Gen. 4: 10).

Here in Bemidbar we hear a similar sentiment: "You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it" (Num. 35: 13). The verb *ch-n-ph*, which appears twice in this verse and nowhere else in the Mosaic books, means to pollute, to soil, to dirty, to defile. There is something fundamentally blemished about a world in which murder goes unpunished. Human life is sacred. Even justified acts of bloodshed, as in the case of war, still communicate impurity. A Cohen who has shed blood does not bless the people.[1] David is told that he may not build the Temple "because you shed much blood." [2] Death defiles.

That is what lies behind the idea of revenge. And though the Torah rejects revenge except when commanded by God,[3] something of the idea survives in the concept of the *goel ha-dam*, wrongly translated as 'blood-avenger.' It means, in fact, 'blood-redeemer.' A redeemer is someone who rights an imbalance in the world, who rescues someone or something and restores it to its rightful place. Thus Boaz redeems land belonging to Naomi.[4] A redeemer is one who restores a relative to freedom after they have been forced to sell themselves into slavery.[5] God redeems His people from bondage in Egypt. A blood-redeemer is one who ensures that murder does not go unpunished.

However not all acts of killing are murder. Some are *bi-shgagah*, that is, unintentional, accidental or inadvertent. These are the acts that lead to exile in the cities of refuge. However, there is an ambiguity about this law. Was exile to the cities of refuge considered as a way of protecting the accidental killer, or was it itself a form of punishment, not the death sentence that would have applied to one guilty

of murder, but punishment none the less. Recall that exile is a biblical form of punishment. Adam and Eve, after their sin, were exiled from Eden. Cain, after killing Abel, was told he would be "a restless wanderer on the face of the earth." We say in our prayers, "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land."

In truth both elements are present. On the one hand the Torah says, "The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the redeemer of blood and send the accused back to the city of refuge to which they fled" (Num. 35: 25). Here the emphasis is on protection. But on the other, we read that if the exiled person "ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which they fled and the redeemer of blood finds them outside the city, the redeemer of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder" (Num. 35: 26-27). Here an element of guilt is presumed, otherwise why would the blood redeemer be innocent of murder?[6]

We can see the difference by looking at how the Talmud and Maimonides explain the provision that the exile must stay in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. What had the High Priest to do with accidental killing? According to the Talmud, the High Priest "should have asked for mercy [i.e. should have prayed that there be no accidental deaths among the people] and he did not do so." [7] The assumption is that had the High Priest prayed more fervently, God would not have allowed this accident to happen. Whether or not there is moral guilt, something wrong has occurred and there is a need for atonement, achieved partly through exile and partly through the death of the High Priest. For the High Priest atoned for the people as a whole, and when he died, his death atoned for the death of those who were accidentally killed.

Maimonides, however, gives a completely different explanation in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III: 40). For him the issue at stake is not atonement but protection. The reason the man goes into exile in a city of refuge is to allow the passions of the relative of the victim, the blood-redeemer, to cool. The exile stays there until the death of the High Priest, because his death creates a mood of national mourning, which dissolves the longing for revenge – "for it is a natural phenomenon that we find consolation in our misfortune when the same misfortune or a greater one befalls another person. Amongst us no death causes more grief than that of the High Priest."

The desire for revenge is basic. It exists in all societies. It led to cycles of retaliation – the Montagues against the Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*,

the Corleones and Tattaglias in The Godfather – that have no natural end. Wars of the clans were capable of destroying whole societies.[8]

The Torah, understanding that the desire for revenge as natural, tames it by translating it into something else altogether. It recognizes the pain, the loss and moral indignation of the family of the victim. That is the meaning of the phrase *goel ha-dam*, the blood-redeemer, the figure who represents that instinct for revenge. The Torah legislates for people with all their passions, not for saints. It is a realistic code, not a utopian one.

Yet the Torah inserts one vital element between the killer and the victim's family: the principle of justice. There must be no direct act of revenge. The killer must be protected until his case has been heard in a court of law. If found guilty, he must pay the price. If found innocent, he must be given refuge. This single act turns revenge into retribution. This makes all the difference.

People often find it difficult to distinguish retribution and revenge, yet they are completely different concepts. Revenge is an I-Thou relationship. You killed a member of my family so I will kill you. It is intrinsically personal. Retribution, by contrast, is impersonal. It is no longer the Montagues against the Capulets but both under the impartial rule of law. Indeed the best definition of the society the Torah seeks to create is *nomocracy*: the rule of laws, not men.

Retribution is the principled rejection of revenge. It says that we are not free to take the law into our own hands. Passion may not override the due process of the law, for that is a sure route to anarchy and bloodshed. Wrong must be punished, but only after it has been established by a fair trial, and only on behalf, not just of the victim but of society as a whole. It was this principle that drove the work of the late Simon Wiesenthal in bringing Nazi war criminals to trial. He called his biography *Justice, not Vengeance*. The cities of refuge were part of this process by which vengeance was subordinated to, and replaced by, retributive justice.

This is not just ancient history. Almost as soon as the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War came to an end in 1989, brutal ethnic war came to the former Yugoslavia, first in Bosnia then Kosovo. It has now spread to Iraq, Syria and many other parts of the world. In his book *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, Michael Ignatieff wondered how these regions descended so rapidly into chaos. This was his conclusion:

The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honor their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between the generations; the violence it engenders is a ritual form of respect for the community's dead – therein lies its legitimacy. Reconciliation is difficult precisely because it must compete with the powerful alternative morality of violence. Political terror is tenacious because it is an ethical practice. It is a cult of the dead, a dire and absolute expression of respect.[9]

It is foolhardy to act as if the desire for revenge does not exist. It does. But given free reign, it will reduce societies to violence and bloodshed without end. The only alternative is to channel it through the operation of law, fair trial, and then either punishment or protection. That is what was introduced into civilization by the law of the cities of refuge, allowing retribution to take the place of revenge, and justice the place of retaliation.

[1] Berakhot 32b; Rambam, *Hilkhot Tefillah* 15: 3.

[2] I Chronicles 22: 8.

[3] Only God, the giver of life, can command us to take life, and then often only on the basis of facts known to God but not to us.

[4] See Ruth, chs. 3-4.

[5] See Lev. 25, where the verb appears 19 times.

[6] See Amnon Bazak, 'Cities of refuge and cities of flight,' in *Torah Mi-Etzion*, Devarim, Maggid, Jerusalem, 2012, 229-236.

[7] Makkot 11a.

[8] See Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

[9] Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor*, New York: Henry Holt, 2000. p. 188.

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