

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAET'HANAN

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 40: 1-26
JULY 20, 2013 13 AB 5773

Kiddush this week is sponsored by Leon and Karen Sutton to commemorate the yehrtzeit of Leon's father Mordechai Ben Avraham.

Kiddush is also sponsored by Robert Krouss in celebration of his mother's 100th birthday. Abal 120!

Kiddush is also sponsored by Jeff Metviner In honor of his birthday.

Any of us who received an appliance voucher from The Buzz or AHC must keep in mind that these appliances must be chosen no later than 7/30/13. You may make arrangements for delivery at another time.

After 7/30, these vouchers will become void.

Candles: 8:04 PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:29 AM

11:00 - 12:00 Orah's will be here with our Shabbat Morning Kids Program upstairs in the Rabbi's study. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . . And Leah Colish will be babysitting down in the playroom

6:30 - Shabbat Afternoon Oneg with Rabbi Yosef and Leah; Treats, Stories, Basketball, Hula-hoop, Parsha Quiz, Tefillot, Raffles and Fun! Supervised play during Seudat Shelishit.

5:30: Ladies Torah Class at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive.

Pirkei Avot with Rav Aharon: 6:45 Minha: 7:20 PM –
Seudah Shelishi and a Class 7:55 – with David
Evening Service (Arbith): 8:55 PM - Shabbat Ends: 9:04 PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:30 AM class – Honest Business Practices
Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 7PM

We want to thank Rabbi Colish for organizing a meaningful Tisha Be'Av.

We are six weeks away from the High Holidays
Please pay your outstanding bills
Its crucial at this time that we have your support
If you need help with your statement please speak with Hal or Ely

As we noted in our email earlier this week,
We are looking forward to receiving a plan for the garden in the
Front of the Synagogue
We apologize for the eye sore
This resulted from a definite misunderstanding
And we look forward to this being corrected

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Our weekly article is now printed in the Jewish Voice. Please pick up a copy at your local shop or go on line to JewishVoiceNY.com. You can also comment on the articles there and tweet them to your friends.

Follow us on twitter @BenaiAsher for a daily dose of Torah, Israel or something of interest

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

Editors Notes

Something strange has been happening for the last few weeks. Too many people who learn that I'm the Parnass or Rabbi of the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach, want to know if I'm friends with Billy Crystal. Billy Crystal, the comedian and actor has been in the news lately. He recently donated one million dollars to the city's relief fund and is starring in commercials enticing people to spend time at the little city by the shore.

It's been 9 months since Sandy struck, but Long Beach is still struggling to set things back in order. And it's great that a guy so well-known makes the commitment both in time and money to keep us in people's minds. Hint, hint ... we still need your help folks.

Three weeks ago on Staurday, while most of us including me were in the Synagogue, Billy Crystal presented the City of Long Beach with two checks totaling \$1 million. As he tells it, earlier this year at Muhammad Ali's fundraiser for Parkinson's disease which took place in Phoenix, a group led by Crystal which included Ali, Steve Martin, Robert Di Nero, and Robin Williams, raised \$888,000 for the city's relief fund, to assist the city to rebuild after Hurricane Sandy. As nice as \$888,000 is, \$1 million sounds a lot better. So Billy and his wife, Janice, presented a personal check for \$112,000, to round off the donation to \$1 million.

The next question I get asked if we are getting some of the funds for the community. Well I'm not sure as the donors are working with the city to decide its best use. I'm not counting on it so again, hint, hint ...

My dear friend Ely Altarac who helps run the Synagogue and has been instrumental in all charitable endeavors in town from the volunteer fire department to the VFW told me that Billy is a special guy. While Ely knows Billy's brother Joe, a city councilman for many years, he's never met Billy. But



he did remind me that Billy is a guy who is proud of his roots. Any time he is interviewed Billy always mentions he is from Long Beach.

It's a great lesson to all of us. Never forget where you come from. Never forget your roots. When you can, be sure to help. Give your time and give your money.

A decade ago Billy Crystal came to make Broadway look mahvelous in his debut in "700 Sundays" - an autobiographical one-man show filled with stories and schtick. Headlines called it a one-mensch show. A few weeks ago on the sands of Long Beach he re-enacted his role, not as an actor, nor as a comedian, but as a mensch.

Wishing a friend Bon Voyage

This week, The Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach bids farewell to Rabbi E.

Samuel Klibanoff who is trading in the beach for the Jersey countryside as he with his wife Dr. Sarah Klibanoff, & Family begin a new chapter leading Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston. Mentioning Sandy and Billy



Crystal, I would be remiss in not again thanking Rabbi Klibanoff for all his help during the storm. He was one of the first to call and ask what help I needed. He personally went out and raised money for those in need. He cut one of the first checks of \$10,000 to us while we stood in the street watching water being pumped. And he found homes for people who needed a place to stay setting up a friend and his family in a house down the block for him for six months.

Rabbi Klibanoff is an amazing guy. He has an incredible skill where he makes people comfortable and connects with them. He makes himself a regular

guy. And he brings out the best in those around him. I have often called him asking how to handle some situation or another. He's always been there for us. I will miss seeing him on Sunday afternoons, when he makes sure to fine me a Sephardic Siddur for mincha and arbit. I hope to stay in touch with him. At least in his new Synagogue which houses a Sephardic Minyan, the search for that siddur won't be so elusive.

We wish him and his family the best of luck in the future in their new home. Rabbi Klibanoff, let us know how we can help.

We also wish the best to the JCAB and stand ready to assist them in any way we can as they go through this transitional period.

Fulfilling The Dreams of Our Ancestors

Let me tell you about a strange phenomenon; one which you might have experienced as well. Our children grow up in our homes. We see them all the time. We try to talk with them. But why is it that we can often have the best conversations and the most conversations with them when they are sitting on another continent halfway around the world?



My daughter Mikhayla took off for Peru on Sunday with a few friends. She is there now working in a clinic, The first day I believe she was helping to deliver and take care of babies. On the second day there, after about ten minutes of training she became a full-fledged Peruvian doctor with 150

patients. Now those of you who have followed my column for years know that Mikhayla is a professional Chef. But in her desire to do good, she organized this trip with five friends, who all happen to be on medical tracts in school – See Mikhayla in the picture standing with her friend Dr. Chantal Low formerly of the Israeli army and now of the University of Pennsylvania. In addition she started a charity with her friends distributing shoes to orphanages in memory of her grandfather Jerry Werman, whose

dream was to provide a pair of shoes for everyone in the world.

I find that whenever one of my children travel they communicate with me that much more often and it's generally that much more meaningful. And today with face time, it's like we're sitting together in the same room.

In preparing this week's article and after reading the blog from Peru that the girls are writing I started looking back at my notes from when my other kids traveled. I read through some of Jonah's experiences in Jerusalem, Mikhayla in China, Moses in the Ukraine, and even Mariyah at camp, and I came across notes of a conversation with my daughter Aryana going back 6 years this week.

At the time I noted that I always enjoy the conversations I have with my kids when they are in Israel. (With Mikhayla it doesn't matter where she is because she lives and breathes Israel and takes Israel with her.) It must be as the Talmud tells us in Baba Batra 158b that it's because "The 'air' of the Land of Israel makes one clever"

Ramban - Nachmanides explains that each of the 70 nations has its own archangel, who is the conduit for the divine flow of sustenance and blessing which is intended for that nation. The only land which receives its blessing from G-d without the services of any intermediaries is the holy land of Israel.

It must be that acknowledged or not, when our children find themselves in Israel they are touched by a sense of the presence of Hashem and it affects their entire beings.

My children all have spent time studying in Israel, the three older for a year or more and the younger ones with us. I find that spending time in The Holy Land is like recharging the spiritual batteries.

Aryana had asked me at the time for help in preparing a short devar Torah for a friend which focuses on the beginning of this week's portion. Moses begins by telling the Jewish people how he pleaded with the Almighty to let him see the Land of Israel. He relates: "I implored Hashem at that time, saying: 'My Lord, Hashem you have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand, for what power is there in the heaven or on the earth that can perform according to Your deeds and according to Your mighty acts? Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon'" (Deuteronomy 3:23-25)

We discussed relating Moshe's desire to entire the land with the privilege that those studying there today have in being in the land.

In examining the above verse though, we found a difficulty. The prelude and the plea seem disjointed. What connection is there between Moshe having begun to see "Hashem's greatness and strong hand," and his next request to enter the Land of Israel?

Can we suggest that Moshe's strategy is to tell Hashem, "I have just begun to see Your greatness, please let me culminate this great experience with a grand finale entering Israel." But that seems odd. Is it possible to compare the land he desires to enter with all he saw during the amazing desert trek?

Is there any sight comparable to the splitting of the sea? Will there be any produce as amazing as the manna? Will there be any water sweeter than that of the rock? Can Moshe honestly be hinting that Israel could be the apex of His glory, as opposed to an anticlimax to forty-years filled with miraculous events?

Using my trusty Torah search engine, I found a beautiful explanation posted earlier in the day by a Benjamin A Rose who brings a story of a man going to Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, author of Alei Shur, Mashgiach of Yeshiva Be'er Yaakov.. He reminds his readers that Rabbi Wolbe is a very soft-spoken man. In his quiet manner and measured words, his mussar message impacts thousands through profound talks and prolific writings.

So the story goes that the man who was a cousin of his fathers, went to the rabbi's home. The visit was certainly less formal and more personal given the relationship. They were discussing a bit about the Rav's Swedish roots and European topography. They came to the subject of the Swiss Alps. The man said "I heard in the name of the Brisker Rav,) that when the Mashiach will come, he will transport the Swiss Alps and transplant them in Israel."

Upon hearing me utter those words, Rav Wolbe's tranquil demeanor changed immediately. He stood up to his full height. There was fire in his eyes.

"Der Brisker Rav hut das kain mohl nisht gezagt!" (For those of us without mastery over the Yiddish language we translate:

The Brisker Rav could never have said that!" he boomed. Rav Wolbe continued with a soliloquy filled with passion. "There are no mountains as beautiful as those in Tz'fat. There are no lakes as beautiful as the

Kineret. And there is no city that sparkles like Jerusalem! Mashiach need not bring anything here! It is all here!"

The passion shown there by Rav Wolbe is one every Jew should strive to attain. Our land is Beautiful.

Perhaps Moshe was pleading as an expression of the Jew's eternal longing, appreciation, and passion for Eretz Yisrael. His statement "Hashem, you have just started to show me the power and the glory" is clearer. Moshe understood that all the miracles, the splitting of the sea, the miraculous manna, the water from the rock, were only a prelude to Eretz Yisrael and would not compare to the greatness attainable from the majestic experience of entering the land.

Mr Rose concludes by reminding us that, entering the land is a longing every Jew should have.

I discussed with Aryana that for thousands of years, the Jewish people dreamed of coming to the land; yet most never came. For thousands of years Jews prayed 3 times a day with tears hoping to come to the land; yet most never even had the opportunity. And we can only imagine that just as Moshe prayed, our own ancestors beseeched Hashem. But their requests were not granted. Or perhaps they were.

Their prayers were finally answered. Perhaps they couldn't experience those answered prayers, but those prayers were answered for us, their descendants.

My friend Allen Pilevsky often tells me about his Rabbi, Rabbi JJ (Yaakov Yehuda) Hecht, z'sl. He was the brother of my father's dear friend Rabbi Abraham Hecht. While one brother married Allen and Shoshana, the other brother was one of the Rabbis who married Chantelle and me. Rabbi JJ Hecht's yahrzeit is Tu Be'Av and I saw a beautiful story adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Rabbi Aron-Leib Raskin.



The Last Jewish Organization

It was 1989. Yoav Eitan arrived in New York City from Israel having heard that the streets of New York were paved with gold. As a disabled soldier - he had

been maimed in battle - he felt that he would have brighter prospects for making a living in the United States.

Like the immigrants of the early 1900s, Yoav soon found out that there was no gold lining the streets of New York city. And, try as he might, he was finding it impossible to get a job. Each time he responded to a "Help Wanted" sign in a store window, he was immediately asked, "Green card?" And every time, Yoav shook his head "No."

The small sum of money that Yoav had brought with him to America soon ran out and he was forced to sleep on benches in Central Park. Each day when he went to yet another few stores to ask for a job, he now asked for food or money in response to the inevitable question, "Green card?"

One night when he was falling asleep on a park bench, a priest who was known to make the rounds throughout Central Park tapped Yoav on the shoulder. "Do you drink?" he asked Yoav. Yoav said "no." "Do you do drugs?" the priest continued. Again, Yoav's answer was "No."

"In that case," the priest offered, "come with me. You can eat in our soup kitchen and sleep in our shelter."

That night was the first time Yoav went to sleep with a full stomach, freshly showered, and on a bed in many, many weeks. In the morning, the priest greeted Yoav warmly. Yoav began telling the priest his story, how he had come from Israel to America to try his luck in the land of opportunity but had not been lucky at all. "I'm not afraid to work hard, but I don't have a green card," he told the priest.

"I am going to call some Jewish organizations to see if any of them can help you," the priest told Yoav. "In the meantime, take this \$20, go out and see what you can find."

Each morning, upon awakening, Yoav would ask the priest if he had found a Jewish organization that could help him, and each day the priest told him that none could be of any help. "Tell him to go back to Israel," many of them even responded.

The priest would then give Yoav another \$20 and encourage him to go look for a job.

One morning the priest told Yoav, "There is only one Jewish organization left in the phone book for me to call. I will call the National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education right now. But if they tell me, like every other Jewish organization, that

they cannot help you, I would like to give you an offer. If you will convert to Christianity, then I promise you that within 6 months you will have a green card and a job."

The priest called up the NCFJE office in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and was put through to Rabbi "JJ" Hecht, founder and executive director of the NCFJE. "I have one of your boys here in our church," the priest told Rabbi Hecht. "He's an Israeli with no money and no job. Every other Jewish organization has told me they can't help him. What about you?"

"Tell him to wait for me outside of the church. I'll be there in 15 minutes."

As Rabbi Hecht ran out of his office, he shouted to his secretary to cancel all of his appointments for the rest of the day. He dashed into his car and drove to the address of the church in Manhattan in record time. He stopped his car with a screech--on the sidewalk!--in front of the steps of the church. He ran up the steps of the church, where Yoav was waiting with the priest.

"I need a green card," Yoav told the rabbi, defiantly.

"You need a neshama (soul)," Rabbi Hecht told him boldly.

"The church is promising me a green card in 6 months if I convert," Yoav countered.

"I'll get you one in 3 months," said Rabbi Hecht.

Yoav thanked the priest for all of his help, gathered his little bundle of belongings, and got into Rabbi Hecht's car (still parked on the sidewalk). When they arrived in the NCFJE office, Rabbi Hecht told Yoav, "Anything you need, any time you need, you come to me." Rabbi Hecht then introduced Yoav to some of his sons, saying, "These are my sons and now you are like another one of my 12 children."

Over the next few days, Rabbi Hecht found Yoav an apartment and a job. Once every week or so, Yoav would inquire about the green card. "I'm working on it," Rabbi Hecht would tell him.

One day Yoav arrived at the office looking for Rabbi Hecht. The secretary told Yoav gently that Rabbi Hecht had passed away the week before. After Yoav got over the initial shock, he asked, "How am I going to get my green card now?" The secretary just shrugged.

The story could end here, and probably no one would be the wiser about another one of the thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people whose lives Rabbi Hecht personally touched, changed, saved. But it doesn't.

Soon thereafter, Yoav became engaged to Alba, who had been working in the Kiddie Korner Preschool of Congregation Bnai Abraham Synagogue in Brooklyn Heights. Alba asked her boss, the rabbi of the Congregation and director of Chabad of Brooklyn Heights, Rabbi Aron-Leib Raskin, to officiate at the wedding.

The rabbi happily agreed, and then promptly invited Yoav to come see him so they could get acquainted. In their meeting, Yoav told his story, speaking in loving and respectful terms about Rabbi JJ Hecht and how Rabbi Hecht had literally saved him, body and soul.

That's when Rabbi Raskin told Yoav that he was Rabbi Hecht's grandson! Yoav became extremely excited, and doubly happy that this was the rabbi who would officiate at their wedding.

Not only that, when Rabbi Raskin heard that Yoav still didn't have the green card, he told him that as Rabbi Hecht's grandson, he was duty bound to take care of it. A highly energetic fellow, very much in the style of his grandfather, Rabbi Raskin succeeded in helping Yoav find a better job, and volunteered to be his sponsor for a green card, and thus was fulfilled the final clause of his grandfather's promise.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

Sefer Devarim is called "Mishneh Torah - The Review of the Torah" because it repeats over 100 mitzvos already mandated in the previous 4 Books. Rav S.R. Hirsch explains that of the 199 Mitzvos commanded in this book, more than 70 are new. The repeated mitzvos focus on areas that will be of greater immediate concern as they encounter the 7 Nations. For example, the prohibition against idol worship. Although already taught, it needed to be reiterated as the Jews would confront the inhabitants of Canaan, who were idolatrous. Those mitzvos whose application was the same, whether in the desert or in the Land, are not reviewed. In Parshas Vaeschanan Moshe continues his final instructions to the Bnai Yisroel.

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe beseeched Hashem to enter the Land. However, he seemingly blamed the nation when his request was turned down. Moshe explained the foundation of our divine mission, which will be recognized by the other nations. Moshe stressed allegiance to Hashem and the consequences to ourselves and our children if we do not keep the law.

3rd & 4th Aliyot: Moshe designated the Cities of Refuge, and reviewed the entire experience of Revelation.

4th, 5th & 6th Aliyot: Moshe stressed the reaction of the nation after the giving of the Torah, and forewarned them not deviate from the Torah, either to the right or the to the left. The first paragraph of Shema is recorded. (6:10-15) Moshe warned the people about the dangers of prosperity, and directed them to keep the commandments and remember the Exodus. Moshe forewarned them about the dangers of assimilation and told them to always remember that they are the Chosen People.

Isaiah 40:1 - 40:26 - This week's Haftorah begins the 7 Haftorah of Consolation selected from the Navi Yishayah. In the aftermath of Tisha B'Av and the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, Hashem embraces his children enveloping them in hope and love. It captures the imagery and emotion of a loving parent who after punishing a wayward child picks up the child and, with tears and hugs, kisses away the pain of distance and separation.

Yishayah paints a picture of the Creator's majesty in nature and history. Prophesying 190 years before the Churban, he described the triumphant resurrection of Tzion and Yerushalayim. The exiled will have returned and the very hills of Jerusalem will testify to the eternity of Hashem and his chosen people. Our ultimate redemption will be far more than a return to Land and nationalism. It will herald the dawning of our greatest accomplishment as we ascend to our rightful place among the nations.

"The word of the Prophet visualizes the time when the "Jacob" nation will in truth have become "Israel", and as the nations of priests of the world, will have accomplished its mission. Then Jerusalem will have become the center, the heart from which, and to which, not only the life stream of Israel, but also that of the whole of mankind intimately connected with Israel pulsates." Rav Hirsch

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

Hashem your G-d shall you fear.” (Debarim 6:13)

Just recently we learned in the Daf Yomi a Gemara (Pesachim 22b) that quotes the above pasuk. It states we are obligated to fear Hashem. The word “et” in the pasuk doesn’t really have a translation, it’s really extra. The Gemara relates that Rabbi Shimon Ha’amsuni expounded the meaning of each mention of the word “et” in the Torah. He taught that each time “et” was mentioned, it’s coming to add something to the object openly stated. However, when he reached the aforementioned verse, he retracted all of his previous efforts, thinking that his premise that “et” adds something must be erroneous. Who could be included in the fear of Hashem?

That was until Rabbi Akiba explained that the “et” of the pasuk teaches that we are not only obligated to fear G-d but also to fear and respect talmidei hachamim, Torah scholars. What was so profound about Rabbi Akiba’s exegetical teaching that Shimon Ha’amsuni did not teach it?

Rabbi Dani Staum quotes the Shai LaTorah that explains that Shimon Ha’amsuni could easily have taught the same teaching, but he was afraid to. Deriving the obligation to fear and honor Torah scholars from the verse that obligates us to fear and honor Hashem seems to equate them. Rabbi Akiba however felt that we are indeed obligated to demonstrate the extreme level of honor and glory to Torah scholars as we owe Hashem.

This is why 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiba dies during the days of the Omer, “because they did not act respectfully toward one another” (Yebamot 62b). Surely the students of Rabbi Akiba accorded one another respect. But it was not enough, because they were the students of Rabbi Akiba who taught that the honor and fear of Torah scholars is derived from the honor and fear of Hashem. They were obligated to demonstrate a far greater level of respect for each other than they did.

When Bar Kamsa maligned the Jews to the Roman Caesar, his first complaint was against the Torah scholars. In our efforts to rebuild the Bet Hamikdash, we must strengthen ourselves in honoring talmidei hachamim. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“You shall do what is upright and good in the eyes of Hashem” The Gemara relates a story of a worker hired by a Rabbi to carry barrels of wine for him. The worker mistakenly broke the barrels and the Rabbi confiscated a garment for his broken barrels. The went to the Bet Din and the ruling was, “Give him back his garment.” Then the worker said he needs to get paid for his work and the employer

exclaimed, “How can I pay you if you not only didn’t benefit me, you caused me a loss?” The Bet Din told the Rabbi to pay him his wages. The Rabbi asked, “Is this the halachah?” He was told, “In your case you must go beyond the letter of the law.” The worker was a poor needy fellow and the Rabbi had the means to pay him, even though he was undeserving. Sometimes we have to go beyond the letter of the law and do what the spirit of the law wants. This is called *ihsv ,ruan ohbpk*, “going the extra mile.” The Rabbis tell us that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because the people were too exacting with each other, without overlooking faults or problems. To counter that we need to go the other way and be tolerant and sometimes even give in when we’re right. Whether it involves money, honor or other things, if we learn to act *ihsv ,ruan ohbpk*, if we go beyond the letter of the law, we will live life with more tranquility and hasten the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Self-Confidence

Did you ever watch a little boy acting wild just to attract notice? Attention seeking changes with age. A small child who feels that no one is paying attention to him will do anything to create excitement. Yet, a teenager who develops an unsightly blemish will refuse to go out in public because she is convinced that everyone will laugh at her. A middle-aged person might not dress to perfection because “nobody ever notices me.” And once people join the ranks of the elderly, their attitude often becomes, “I hope no one notices me!”

All of these attitudes demonstrate a lack of self-confidence. If you learn the right values from truly ethical teachers, you can develop the ability to decide whether something is right or wrong without taking a survey of friends, neighbors, and business associates. You will be able to decide whether you were dressed properly, spoke effectively at the meeting, or dealt with any situation in the correct fashion. Self-confidence means you trust yourself to evaluate your own actions.

Before questioning your behavior because you fear that it might not meet the approval of your associates, evaluate your behavior internally. It takes a minute, but it will save you from many mistakes you might otherwise make while trying to get the approval of others. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
Every Prayer is Effective

Parashat Vaethanan begins with Moshe recalling his impassioned prayer to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. Our Sages teach that Moshe recited 515 prayers at this time, alluded to by the word "Vaethanan" ("I pleaded"), which has the numerical value of 515. Finally, after reciting 515 prayers, G-d told Moshe to stop praying, because he was not being allowed entry into Eretz Yisrael.

The question naturally arises, why didn't G-d stop Moshe earlier? If G-d was determined to forbid Moshe from entering the land, why did He wait until Moshe recited 515 prayers before stopping him? If the prayers were going to be unanswered, would it not have been preferable for Moshe to do something more productive? Didn't he have work to do that was more valuable than prayers which were destined from the outset to be unanswered?

The Gemara speaks of prayer as "something which stands at the height of the world, but people belittle it" ("Omed Be'rumo Shel Olam U'beneh Adam Mezalzelin Bo"). In other words, prayer is underrated. People do not afford it the importance and value that it deserves. Too often we treat prayer as just an obligatory ritual, or as an optional religious activity, without recognizing its immense value and power.

There are several reasons why people belittle the importance of prayer. First, because we do it so often, it becomes routine and monotonous, and we thus fail to invest the time and emotional energy it deserves. Secondly, the daily prayers require a strict, regimented schedule that is difficult for many people to follow, and thus they give it up.

But the main reason why people do not afford prayer the importance and attention it deserves is because they have grown up with a fundamentally flawed perspective on prayer. Many of us are always told that if we want something we should pray for it, and continue praying until our prayers are unanswered. We were thus trained to perceive prayer as nothing more but a means of achieving what we want. And thus when we do not get what we pray for, we give up. This causes us to "belittle" prayer. We see that our prayers don't work, and thus conclude that it's not useful.

But this is not what prayer is about. Prayer is inherently valuable, and every single prayer has some positive effect. It might not be the effect we had

in mind, but it is effective. We might compare prayer to rainclouds. There is plenty of moisture in the sky, but we do not know precisely when or where any given drop will fall. Our prayers enter the heavenly "prayer bank," as it were, and form a "prayer cloud." G-d, in His infinite wisdom, decides when and how each prayer will be used. We do not have access to this information, but we do know that each and every word of prayer that we recite is inherently valuable and will have some effect at some point.

There was once a boy who fervently prayed for an ill patient named Yosef Ben Shimon. He recited his prayers tearfully and with genuine emotion, and was devastated when Yosef Ben Shimon passed away, figuring that his prayers were recited for naught. He did not know that across the country, in California, there was another ill patient named Yosef Ben Shimon. He fully recovered from his illness, and after his recovery he had a daughter. That girl grew up and married the fellow who had recited for the other Yosef Ben Shimon.

His prayers were answered, but not in the way he thought. Because of his prayers, his future wife came into the world.

Prayer is "Omed Be'rumo Shel Olam." Every single prayer hovers in the sky, waiting until the moment when Hashem determines it should have its effect. We must therefore cherish prayer and utilize this great gift, without ever belittling it. We must rest assured that our prayers will have an effect, and this should motivate us to approach Tefilla with the seriousness and emotion that it deserves.

Rabbi Wein

This Shabat is Shabat Nachamu, the Shabat that begins for us a cycle of comfort and consolation after the weeks of sadness and mourning over the past tragedies of the Jewish people. These next seven weeks of healing comfort will lead us into the bright, new year that awaits us. In this week's parsha there is to be found, so to speak, the short course and synopsis of all of Judaism – the Ten Commandments, the Shema and the explanation of the Exodus from Egypt to be given to the wise son.

In a general sense, the entire structure of Torah and Jewish life is encapsulated for us in the parsha of the week. Since this Shabat is invariably also Shabat Nachamu, it is not difficult to see that the Torah is teaching us that comfort and consolation are spiritual values and attainments and not necessarily dependent upon material wealth or worldly success.

Our society, so rich in material goods and advanced technology, suffers greatly from all sorts of mental and social dysfunction. Depression is the “black dog” (Churchill’s words for his recurring bouts of depression) that affects over a third of the citizens of the Western world! True comfort and serenity within human beings are difficult to achieve and most precarious to maintain.

The Torah in this week’s parsha, in order to help and guide us, gives us a formula to achieve this elusive goal of contentment. And, it lies within the parameters of those three principles of Jewish faith outlined in the parsha of the week.

The Ten Commandments create for us a structure of belief and morality that every individual can aspire and ascribe to, no matter how decadent the society in which one finds oneself enmeshed in. The moral strictures that protect life, property and person are the basic rules of Jewish faith and life. The dysfunction between parents and children, a 24/7 commercial world, accepted robbery and corruption as a social norm, daily murders and a completely sexually dissolute society – how can one avoid being depressed in such a milieu?

All of civilization teeters on the fulcrum of those Ten Commandments. They point the way out of the social morass that sucks us down to destruction. The Shema is the vehicle of connection of our soul with the Creator Who fashioned us and gave us life. The belief in the one and universal God Who rules and is omniscient and omnipotent is the greatest gift of the Jews to the human race. It gives us discipline and security, purity and nobility, the whiff of immortality and the security in knowing that life is never in vain.

And finally, the understanding of the uniqueness of Israel in God’s scheme of things, as represented in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, gives structure and perspective to our national and personal lives. But it takes wisdom and knowledge – a wise son – to appreciate and treasure this memory of the distant past. Memory alone can also give us a sense of comfort and well-being and contribute towards the consolation and contentment we so ardently seek.

Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth
Philosophy or Prophecy

One of the most profound disagreements in Judaism is that between Moses Maimonides and Judah Halevi on the meaning of the first of the Ten Commandments.

For Maimonides (1135-1204), the first command is to believe in God, creator of heaven and earth:

The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realise that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being. If it could be supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist. If however it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist . . . To acknowledge this truth is a positive command, as it is said: “I am the Lord your God” (Ex. 20:2, Deut 5:7). (Yesodei ha-Torah, 1: 1-5)

Judah Halevi (c. 1080-c.1145) disagreed. The greatest of medieval Hebrew poets, Halevi also wrote one of Judaism’s philosophical masterpieces, The Kuzari. It is framed as a dialogue between a rabbi and the King of the Khazars. Historically, the Khazars were a Turkish people who, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, ruled a considerable area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, including southern Russia, northern Caucasus, eastern Ukraine, Western Kazakhstan, and northwestern Uzbekistan.

Many Jewish traders and refugees lived there, and in 838 the Khazar King Bulan converted to Judaism, after supposedly holding a debate between representatives of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. The Arabic writer Dimashqi writes that the Khazars, having encountered the Jewish faith, “found it better than their own and accepted it”. Khazaria thus became, spiritually as well as geographically, an independent third force between the Muslim Caliphate and the Christian Byzantine Empire. After their conversion, the Khazar people used Jewish personal names, spoke and wrote in Hebrew, were circumcised, had synagogues and rabbis, studied the Torah and Talmud, and observed the Jewish festivals.

The Kuzari is Judah Halevi’s philosophy of Judaism, cast in the form of the imagined conversation between the King and a rabbi that led to the King’s conversion. In it, Halevi draws a portrait that is diametrically opposed to what would later become Maimonides’ account. Judaism, for Halevi, is not Aristotelian but counter-Aristotelian. The God of the prophets, says Halevi, is not the God of the philosophers. The key difference is that whereas the philosophers found God in metaphysics, the prophets found God in history.

This is how Halevi’s rabbi states his faith:

I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having brought them through the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way . . . (Kuzari I:11)

He goes on to emphasise that God's opening words in the revelation at Mount Sinai were not, "I am the Lord your God, creator of heaven and earth" but "I am the Lord your God "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Kuzari I: 25).

Halevi lived before Maimonides. Nachmanides (R. Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) lived after, but he too disagreed with Maimonides' interpretation of the opening verse of the Ten Commandments. His objection is based on a passage in the Mekhilta:

"You shall have no other gods besides me." Why is this said? Because it says, "I am the Lord your God." To give a parable: A king of flesh and blood entered a province. His servants said to him, "Issue decrees for the people." He, however, told them, "No. When they accept my sovereignty, I will issue decrees. For if they do not accept my sovereignty, how will they carry out my decrees?"

According to Nachmanides the verse, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" is not a command, but a preliminary to the commands. It explains why the Israelites should be bound by the will of God. He had rescued them, liberated them, and brought them to safety. The first verse of the Decalogue is not a law but a statement of fact, a reason why the Israelites should accept God's sovereignty.

Thanks to a series of archeological discoveries in the twentieth century, we now know that Nahmanides was right. The biblical covenant has the same literary structure as ancient near eastern political treaties, of which the oldest known are the "Stele of the Vultures" (before 2500 BCE), recording the victory of Eannatum, king of Lagash, over the people of Umma, both in southern Mesopotamia, and the treaty of Naram-Sin, king of Kish and Akkad, with the people of Elam (c. 2280 BCE). Other, later treaties have also been discovered, involving Hittites, Arameans and Assyrians. One details a pact between the Hittite king Hattusilis III and the Pharaoh Rameses II, regarded by some scholars as the Pharaoh of the exodus.

These treaties usually follow a six-part pattern, of which the first three elements were [1] the preamble, identifying the initiator of the treaty, [2] a historical

review, summarizing the past relationship between the parties, and [3] the stipulations, namely the terms and conditions of the covenant. The first verse of the Ten Commandments is a highly abridged form of [1] and [2]. "I am the Lord your God" is the preamble. "Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" is the historical review. The verses that follow are the stipulations, or as we would call them, the commands. Nachmanides and the Midrash are therefore correct in seeing the verse as an introduction, not a command.

What is at stake in this difference of opinion between Maimonides on the one hand, Judah Halevi and Nachmanides on the other? At the heart of Judaism is a twofold understanding of the nature of God and His relationship to the universe. God is creator of the universe and the maker of the human person "in His image". This aspect of God is universal. It is accessible to anyone, Jew or gentile. Aristotle arrived at it through logic and metaphysics. For him, God was the "prime mover" who set the universe into motion. Today, many people reach the same conclusion through science: the universe is too finely tuned for the emergence of life to have come into being through chance (this is sometimes called the anthropic principle). Some arrive at it not through logic or science but through a simple sense of awe and wonder ("Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystical" said Wittgenstein). This aspect of God is called by the Torah, Elokim.

There is, however, a quite different aspect of God which predominates throughout most of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. This is God as He is involved in the fate of one family, one nation: the children of Israel. He intervenes in their history. He makes a highly specific covenant with them at Sinai – not at all like the general one He made with Noah and all humanity after the Flood. The Noahide covenant is simple and basic. The sages said it involved a mere seven commands. The Sinai covenant, by contrast, is highly articulated, covering almost every conceivable aspect of life. This aspect of God is signaled by the use of the four-letter name for which we traditionally substitute (since the word itself is holy and could only be pronounced by the High Priest) the word Hashem (on the two aspects and names, see Kuzari IV: 1-3; and Ramban to Exodus 3: 13).

Maimonides, the philosopher, emphasized the universal, metaphysical aspect of Judaism and the eternal, unchanging existence of God. Judah Halevi and Nachmanides, the one a poet, the other a mystic, were more sensitive to the particularistic and prophetic dimension of Judaism: the role of God in the historical drama of the covenant. Both are true

and valid, but in this case, Halevi and Nachmanides are closer to the meaning of the biblical text.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"Hear, Israel! Hashem (is) our G-d, Hashem is one" (6:4)

The recitation of the following is a Torah obligation.

The exhortation "Hear!" is actually the Israelite's way of life. "We shall do and we shall listen" (Shemot 24:7) was the vow that Israel made at Sinai. "We shall do" means "We shall obey and fulfill", but "We shall listen" means "We shall Learn". This is the Israelite's career of listening ("Hear, Israel") to the word of Hashem.

It bespeaks the attitude of eagerness to hear and learn, to understand and to become saturated with Hashem's teachings and ways of thought and opinion. In many instances, the word 'Shamoa' (to hear) means also "to obey", but always it bears the connotation of giving attention and thought.

Thus "Hear, Israel" is the summons to all Israel forever to devote their lives to learning the Oneness of Hashem and His attributes and His ways, and the following verses (6:6-9) summon Israel to implement the first verse by means of Torah-study.

Because of the extraordinary importance of the statement, it is preceded by "Hear, Israel", which means: Put your heart into this great teaching and consider it well. The name Israel is here mentioned, for this matter is the foundation of the name Israel, and it is the identity of the people of Israel.

Hashem, the particular name by which He is known to His people, is the Creator (the word Hashem in the Hebrew original denotes both 1) Being and 2) Cause of being ("He that spoke and caused the world to be" – Zevachim 46B). But He is particularly the G-d of Israel (as stated in the scriptures more than 165 times). "He is Hashem our G-d." (Tehillim)

Quoted from
"Fortunate Nation" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

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

Shabbat Shalom From Cyberspace E Mail Edition is published each week since 1995 and is distributed to 18,000 readers. Our goal is to spread torah knowledge. Articles are downloaded from sites and from e-mail forwarded to us. We encourage you to reprint the newsletter and distribute it to co-workers, friends and family. You can retransmit copies by fax, mail or by hand. Be a part of the Mitzvah of spreading torah. It takes so little to make copies and distribute them. And with E Mail it just takes a click to send this along. To subscribe directly or have us send to a friend or family member Send a request to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@Gmail.com with your name, phone, fax and E-Mail Address