

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

MATOT-MAS'EI

JULY 21, 2012

2 AB 5772

DEDICATIONS: By Sam Shetrit wishing Roni a Happy Birthday

In memory of Hagaon Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv
In memory of Ezra Cornman, Ezra ben Carmella
and in memory of Moshe Reisman, Yisroel Moshe ben Chasya Miriam

Attached to the email version of the Newsletter are Sephardic Customs for The Three Weeks through 9 Ab
We will discuss more about the Three weeks on Shabbat

Friday Night: Candles: 8:02PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:26 AM

No sponsor for Kiddush this week. Please sponsor a Kiddush. You can email back, call IDA or go on to our website BenaiAsher.org. Dairy Kiddush starts at \$200, \$300 deluxe and \$400 with Bourikas. Meat Kiddush starts at \$350, \$450 for deluxe and \$600 for the works! Please dedicate one this summer in memory of a loved one, or in honor of a birthday, anniversary, or other occasion.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:40 PM –
Childrens program at 6:40 with Rabbi Colish followed by Minha: 7:20 PM –
Seudah Shelishi and a Class 8:00 – with David –Tragedy and the three weeks
Evening Service (Arbith): 9:00 PM - Shabbat Ends: 9:02PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

NEW MINCHA AND ARBIT SUNDAY – 7:45 PM – Lets see if we can make a minyan each Sunday for the Summer ALSO MONDAY at 7:45 PM preceding Rabbi Yanai and Rabbi Colish's classes

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 8PM Monday night

Hebrew Reading Crash Course – 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome! We would like to pray Mincha and Arbit first on Monday nights. 7:45PM

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David

Ladies Shabbat Class at the home of Tina Lemberger – each Shabbat at 5:30

Volley Ball with Daniel Wagner – Sunday mornings at the beach at 10AM All summer long.

Reserve the date - Scholar in residence - We are pleased to have Rabbi Avraham Priel and his family join us as a scholar in residence, Aug 18, 2012. Rabbi Priel is a well known rabbi from the Sephardic Community, formally of the Sephardic Services at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, the Rabbi is the founder and director of Midrash Yosef Shalom. We will be having a Friday night dinner at the shul where everyone can meet Rabbi Priel and his family in an intimate setting. Rabbi Priel will speak both on Friday night and on Shabbat day after musuf.

To RSVP for the dinner please email Hindy Mizrahi hmizny@gmail.com or Patti Azizo pattif@netscape.com or call Patti 608-2320. Cost for the dinner: Children 3 and under free Children ages 4-10 \$10 Ages 11 and up \$18

LINKS TO THE HESPED for Hindy's brother Moshe Reisman – one of the most moving speeches I've ever heard are attached to the weekly email

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**Take a peek into Kosher
 Culinary Arts School in
 Jerusalem with my daughter
 Mikhayla who is going through
 a rigorous 6 month program.
 This week – bread!
 bitemebymik.blogspot.com**

Editors Notes

Today (Friday) is Rosh Hodesh Av. It is the day my grandmother Victoria Bat Rosa, Victoria Gindi, passed away. I wrote in years passed that, my grandmother was the daughter of a Kohen, the wife of a Kohen, the mother, grandmother and great grandmother of Kohanim and in many ways it seems apropos that she passed away on the same day as her ancestor Aharon HaKohan, Aaron the High Priest.

The Mishnah in Taanit tells us that once the month of Ab begins, we must reduce our joy. This Rosh Hodesh, amidst the tragedies of so many innocents being taken from us, we can do nothing else.

At 5:20 AM on Monday morning, the brother of our dear friend Hindy Mizrahi and the son of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Yaakov Reisman (who have always been there for the community and for me personally especially after Rabbi Abittan z"l passed away), Yisroel Moshe Reisman z"l was Niftar. Moshe, was known as a pure soul who suffered tremendously yet always had a smile on his face and brought a smile to others. He was called special, but was special in so many ways. His short life was an inspiration.

When I received an email on Wednesday telling of the passing of Hagaon Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, the posek hador, I had this strange vision. I saw the

pure soul of Moshe Reisman preparing the way for one of the greatest sages our generation was honored with knowing. I believe that great sages bring protection to the world and shuddered at the thought of a world without Rav Elyashiv.

And then moments later, as news reports came in telling of a homicide bombing in the Bulgarian terror attack killing seven people including Maor Harush and Elior Price from Acre, Itzik Kolangi and Amir Menashe from Petah Tikva and Kochava Shriki from Rishon Letzion and wounding more than thirty I felt the wind blow out of me.

And then this morning, I got a call that Ezra Cornman, the 12 year old son of our friends Stevie and Caroline had passed away the previous afternoon and the funeral would be taking place in New Jersey in a few moments. And when I heard that he passed away after he and his younger brother were digging a tunnel in the sand on the beach and that the walls collapsed, trapping him beneath the sand, I sat down and cried.

It was simply beyond plausibility; it was beyond my ability to comprehend that a little boy digging a three foot tunnel with his mother and a beach load of people and life guards around him could get buried in the sand.

The Three Weeks, The Nine Days, The Ninth of Ab. The Magen Avraham commenting on the Shulchan Aruch tells us that this period is an inauspicious time. And although there are those who argue against this statement, given the tragedies, how does one argue? Call it a dangerous period, call it bad luck, call it what you like. Something happens during these three weeks.

Now far be it for me to even begin to comprehend why it is that the innocents are taken. Moses asked G-d, "show me your face", which we understand to mean, "explain why the world is like it is, why bad things happen to good people". To which G-d responds, "you can only see my back", "you can only understand any of this after you've left the world, after the story ends and after you step out of the picture".

On happy occasions when a groom, or bar mitzvah boy, or father of a baby is called to the Torah, Ashkenazi Synagogues have a custom of the cantor calling the honoree to the Torah with an extended "Yaamod". (Yaamod means "get up".) Moshe Reisman enjoyed doing this and even though he often forgot the name of the one he was calling, it became a tradition. Moshe even had a card as a professional Aliya caller. And he charged for it although he didn't know the difference between a single and a hundred, he made sure to get paid. And it was everyone's honor to have Moshe call them up to the Torah. Concluding his Hespod (eulogy) Rabbi Reisman imagined Moshe rushing up to Hashem in heaven and telling Hashem, (with his voice beaming as he would announce on special occasions for people going up to the Torah), "Yaamod, Yaaaah aaah Mod, Yaaaa aaaa Mohhhhd HASHEM"! Get Up! Please get up Hashem, get up from your throne of judgment and move to your throne of mercy.

I recall learning that there are no bad days, just bad choices. But what choices set these days apart?

And again, this is no attempt to explain, justify, or lift our veil of confusion caused by these tragedies. Maybe it's just a bit of personal therapy.

Rabbi Abittan would teach that all discoveries enable us to better understand the Torah. He would tell us that electricity begins to enable us to understand kabalistic concepts. In a simple direct current circuit, we generally have electrons that flow from the negative pole to the positive pole. In addition to protect ourselves, we have a ground.

In Kabbalah, we have what we call the side of giving or the positive pole, and the side of receiving or restriction, the negative pole. We also have a central column which we can call the balance or the ground.

In Kabbalah we have a concept called the Sephirot where "energy" for lack of a better word, flows down through the sephirot which in simple terms we might understand as transformers. We don't plug our shaver into the power station. Electric is sent from the station through a series of transformers that break down the power until it finally is useful to us. If we plug a 120 Shaver into a 240 line, pop goes the shaver.

When we have a faulty connection between two points of different potential in an electric circuit, the result can be a dangerous short circuit causing damage to everything in its path.

OK, enough of the science lesson.

The three weeks are known as Ben HaMesarim – between the straits. They begin with the 17th of Tamuz when the walls of the second Temple were breached and culminate on the 9th of Ab when both Temples were destroyed. But what made these days potential days of tragedy. Again its not bad days, just bad choices.

Following the Exodus, the Jewish people arrive at Sinai. There we hear the commandments from G-d himself. Moses goes up to the mountain and is scheduled to return 40 days later with the tablets. At that stage we return to the level of Adam before the sin, a world without death, a world without sickness; we return to the world of the Garden of Eden. And just like Adam and his fruit, we too mess up with the Golden Calf. We take a day of unlimited potential, of huge energy, of a flow so powerful it changes the world and we short circuit it. That day was the 17th of Tammuz.

But G-d in his mercy sets our faults aside. We have another chance. One year later we stand at the entrance of the Holy Land. Under Moses leadership, we will conquer the land and create our own Garden. We can again rise to the level of Adam before the sin. And on the day we should have moved into the land, we cry and reject G-d due to the report of the spies. We are doomed to die over the next 40 years. Again on the day we had the power and energy to change the world, we reject it and cause a short circuit. This day is the 9th of Ab.

The three weeks, by our own fault are a period of high voltage dangling wires. Days of the greatest potential become days of the greatest of tragedies. From the expulsion in Spain to World War I and the holocaust. We created a period of dangling wires. We created short circuits. We have energy at the level of a nuclear power plant, but without the transformers, this energy is not only useless to us, it is dangerous.

And who is damaged most during this period? The innocents are. Because we cannot neutralize the negative energy; the energy of baseless hatred, of petty

complaints, the jealousy, and lack of appreciation, we leave it up to those pure positive souls to do it. They sacrifice themselves, so that we don't blow up. They become the lightning rods absorbing the bolts that our actions created.

3324 years ago we were set to plug directly into the greatest power source possible. And what that would have meant is indescribable. The original tablets meant a world of G-dliness. Instead we shorted the circuit. And each year on these days, that rejected potential, those live wires we severed come back to haunt us.

We don't dance on these days. We don't hit. We keep a low profile. We don't eat meat or drink wine. We sit on the floor. We fast. We abstain. We lay low. We avoid the wires. And that helps most of us. But tragically without repairing the circuits, without repairing the transformers, without grounding and balancing the power, we leave the most vulnerable ones in danger. We cause the innocents to deflect the blasts.

So what do we do? We do our bests to comfort the mourners even when the only comfort can come from Heaven. And we examine ourselves. We examine what we did or didn't do. We examine what we could have done and should do. And we commit to change ourselves. If we begin with ourselves, we change the world.

My heart goes out to Stevie & Caroline and to their children, Joey, David, Moshe, Norma, Jacob and Rachel and their extended families. Stevie, how many years did Abie and I stand at the finish line in Central Park waiting for you to complete the marathon, to put our arms around you and laugh. Now I can only put my arms around you and cry. I have no words to comfort you

Stevie. I can only share your tears.

My heart goes out to the Reisman family. My heart goes out to the families of those killed and hurt in Bulgaria. And my heart goes out to all of Klal Yisrael on the loss of our Rabbi, Rav Elyashiv.

May you all be comforted from Heaven. May Hashem comfort you alongside the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

I hope that Moshe and Ezra and the murdered martyrs will stand with Rav Elyashiv (along with my grandmother and Aharon HaKohen) in front of Hashem and beg him, "Yaamod" to get up, from his throne of justice and move to his throne of mercy. May He bring Mashiah quickly and may tragedy be known no more. We long for the days of Bilah HaMavet of Swallowing Death Forever.

May we dance again together in the streets of Jerusalem! Amen!

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The laws of personal vows are detailed and Moshe is instructed to "take revenge" against Midian. In the battle, both Balak and Bilaam are killed.

2nd Aliya: In the aftermath of the war, Moshe instructs the soldiers regarding the applicable laws of Tumah - impurity, and deals with the division of the booty between the soldiers, community, and the Mishkan.

Note verses 22 and 23 which teach us the laws of how to make kosher our vessels, and the Torah requirement for metal vessels made by a non-Jew or purchased from a non-Jew to be immersed in a mikvah before being used. (the

Rabbis extended this law to included glassware)

In appreciation for the fact that not a single soldier was lost in battle, the Generals and Captains donate their personal percentage of the captured gold to the Mishkan. The total weight of the donated gold weighed 837.5 lbs.! (Areyeh Kaplan)

3rd & 4th Aliyot: Moshe is approached by the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and 1/2 of Menashe to acquire the Trans-Jordan territories captured from Sichon and Og. Moshe first treats their petition with suspicion; however, an agreement is reached between the 2 1/2 tribes and Moshe: Trans-Jordan in exchange for manning the front lines in the campaign to take Eretz Yisroel.

5th Aliya: Moshe instructs the Bnai Yisroel to clear out the Land from all negative influences, and sets the Biblical boundaries of the Land.

6th Aliya: New leaders are appointed to oversee the division of the Land, and the 48 Levitical cities, including the 6 Cities of Refuge, are mandated.

7th Aliya: The laws regarding the inadvertent murderer are detailed, and the prohibition against marrying outside one's tribe is established. This prohibition was only for the generation that occupied the Land.

Jeremiah 2:4 - 2:28, 3:4

. In the 2nd chapter of Yirmiyahu, the Navi detailed the extent of the nations infidelity that led up to the Churban - destruction. The leaders, the Kohanim, and the common man had all betrayed G-d's love. Whereas last week the Prophet left us with a vision of G-d's love for His children, this week

his words relentlessly assault our consciousness.

"As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a piece of wood: "you are my father," and to a stone: "You gave birth to me. ...But in the time of their trouble they will say: Arise and save us. Where are your g-ds that you made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble... (Yirmi. 2:26)

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"We will push forward in the vanguard before the Children of Israel." (Bemidbar 32:17)

Sometimes life is funny. There are things that people eagerly await, but when these things finally arrive, they arouse negativity. Rain is one example. Everyone knows what a blessing rain is and looks forward to its coming. But when rain clouds darken the sky, people sigh, "Oh! It's a rainy day."

Then there is old age. We all hope to reach a ripe old age, and we wish each other "Until 120!" But as soon as we start aging and find ourselves unable to do what we used to do, we groan, "Oh my! What's happening to me? I'm getting old!"

The third thing is hearing the truth. We're all eager to hear the truth about ourselves and what people think about us, who we really are. But should anyone dare give us a direct answer, we'll never forgive him. We'll refute it or at least challenge any attack against our status, and reply with a counterattack. That's what most people's love of truth looks like. Let's see the right way to

react when words of truth are spoken.

In our perashah, the tribes of Reuben and Gad approached Moshe Rabbenu. They asked Moshe to give them their portion in the land of Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe responded very forcefully and critically, understanding the two tribes to be asking for the right to settle on the east bank and not participate in the long and hard war to conquer the land of Israel for their brothers. He accused them of forsaking their fellow tribes in a time of danger.

Although they never intended to drag down the Jewish people, and were ready to be the vanguard, they listened humbly as Moshe accused them of failing to understand the importance of being part of the nation. The plan Moshe outlined, that they should be together with everyone else was exactly what they had in mind. Yet they listened patiently to Moshe's words due to their love to hear the truth. Whether they were guilty or not mattered little to them because they loved the truth of Moshe's words.

The lesson for me is to listen closely before reacting. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“One thousand for each tribe, one thousand for each tribe” (Bemidbar 31:4)

When the Jewish people went to war with Midyan, Hashem commanded them to send one thousand men from each tribe. The word “one thousand” is repeated in the Torah and so the Rabbis deduce that there should be two thousand men per tribe, one thousand to do battle and one thousand to pray for the soldiers' success. What an amazing thing! The battle of the

Jews against Midyan was surely Divinely directed. Pinhas was the general and all the soldiers were righteous. Yet they needed prayers for the soldiers to win, and indeed every soldier came back safe and sound, due in great part to those prayers.

Today, when our people in Israel are threatened every single day, when our soldiers are asked to put themselves on the line every time they go on duty, we have to have an equal amount of prayers to protect our brothers and sisters. Let us strengthen our Tehillim, our prayers at the Torah and our prayers in general, for the people of Israel, so that we should also see victory and peace in our days, Amen. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

HABITUAL - One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

The recognition of the part played by healthy diet and regular exercise in maintaining health, along with medical advances and scientific breakthroughs, promote the assumption that the trend towards longer life will continue in the new millennium. If you accept that fact, then you have to rethink the old expression about not teaching an old dog new tricks. I don't know about you, but for me, living longer without growing and getting better is a prospect that I could not accept.

The good news is that a person is not a dog, and a person, unlike a dog, can always learn new behavior patterns and develop good habits. Every time you repeat a behavior until it becomes second nature, you are creating a new habit. You are growing!

Author and life coach Avi Shulman suggests that you start with something simple, such as writing a name next to all phone

numbers that you jot down on tiny slips of paper, matchbooks, and the backs of business cards. How many times have those mysterious, unidentified numbers led to embarrassing phone calls! This may only be a little change, but it results in two benefits. First, you will always know whom you are dialing. Second, you will be developing a new habit!

When you confront a state of affairs that annoys you or makes you unhappy, decide what simple change you can implement to prevent this situation from disturbing you ever again. Then do it. Institute the system and follow it regularly until you've broken the old habit and replaced it with a new one. This simple change in behavior will help keep you growing to a wise and happy old age.

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Words are Not Cheap**

Parashat Matot begins with the subject of Nedarim – vows. There are 613 Misvot in the Torah, and nobody can ever add another Misva. However, a person can take a personal vow rendering something forbidden. This means that if a person declares that coffee is forbidden, coffee becomes as forbidden to him as pork. Just by uttering a sentence, he transforms a beverage that is permissible for all Jews in the world into something that is for him not kosher.

The law of Nedarim reflects the immense power of the spoken word. Judaism does not believe that “words are cheap.” Words are expensive – and remarkably so. In fact, as we read in the very first chapter of the Torah, God created the world through a series of utterances – “God said: Let there be light”; “God said: Let the waters assemble”; etc. The world was created with words – showing us just how powerful

words are. And this is also the message of Nedarim – that the spoken word can yield very far-reaching effects.

Another area in Halacha where this is starkly manifest is marriage. When a bride and groom first enter the Hupa, there is no Halachic connection between them whatsoever. They are boyfriend and girlfriend; no formal relationship exists between them. If the bride decides at the moment she walks under the canopy to back out, she may, and there are no Halachic repercussions. How does this reality change? How does she become the groom's wife, requiring the process of a Get if one party wishes to dissolve the marriage?

The answer is nine words: "Hareh At Mekudeshet Li Be'taba'at Zu Ke'dat Moshe Ve'Yisrael." By uttering these words, the groom transforms him and his bride from close friends to husband and wife.

It is no secret why words were chosen as the medium with which a marriage is created – because words are what makes or breaks a marriage. Words are what produce the status of marriage because words are what will define the marriage from that moment henceforth. The bride and groom are told that words have immense power and must be used wisely and carefully. A hurtful word can cause irreparable damage to a relationship. Words have the capacity to create, and have the capacity to destroy.

The story is told of a woman whose husband frequently insulted her. She would respond angrily, which in turn provoked an even more offensive response, resulting in a spiral of back-and-forth shouting and name-calling. Exasperated, the woman

consulted with her Rabbi, who gave her a curious piece of advice. He said that each time her husband said something hurtful to her, instead of responding, she should take a hammer and bang a nail into some surface.

And so, that day, when the husband insulted the woman, she didn't say a word. She went upstairs with a hammer, and banged a nail into a wall. When he insulted her again for doing something so foolish, she again banged a nail into a wall.

This went on for several weeks, until finally the husband wanted to know what was going on. The wife told him about the Rabbi's suggestion, and showed him the approximately 100 nails in the wall.

"I offended you so many times?" the husband asked.

"Yes," the wife confirmed. "Each nail is another time you said something hurtful to me."

"Well," the husband said, "it should work the other way, as well. Every time I say something nice to you, you should remove a nail from the wall." The idea sounded reasonable, so the wife agreed.

Sure enough, the husband started showering his wife with compliments. He praised her for her meals, her appearance, and her personality, told her how much she meant to him and said that he loved her. Each time, a nail came out of the wall. Finally, the day arrived when the last nail was pulled out.

"You see?" the husband said. "It's all fixed now. The nails are all gone."

"Not quite," the wife replied. "Yes, the nails are gone – but look at all

the holes that are left in the wall. They still need to be filled."

Harsh words leave deep "holes" in the heart, wounds that in some instances can take a lifetime to heal. It's not so simple just to apologize and then expect everything to be back to normal. Many of us can probably still feel the scars left by a hurtful comment made to us by a teacher or friend decades ago. The popular adage, "Sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never harm me" is simply false. Names can harm us – and even more severely than sticks and stones. Physical wounds heal, but emotional wounds, in many instances, don't go away.

This is one of the vital messages of Nedarim. Words are not cheap – they have immense, long-lasting effects, and we must therefore exercise extreme caution in what, when and how we speak, lest we cause damage that cannot be undone.

Rabbi Wein

The narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai concludes with the parshiyot of this week. All of the occurrences, successes and failures that marked this forty year trek in a wasteland wilderness are alluded to in the count of Israel in last week's parsha - and in the listing of all of the way stations of that excursion.

The Torah seems to be determined to remind all later generations of Jews of the experiences in the desert. Moshe, in his final oration in the book of Dvarim, will once again review the events of the desert for a new generation of Jews distanced in time and circumstance from Egyptian bondage. The Torah is aware of human forgetfulness.

It will take only one generation to forget Egypt and even Mount Sinai. History is boring and quite irrelevant to new generations. Yet forgetting the Jewish past is the ultimate betrayal of Judaism and Jewish hopes. All of us, as we become older, begin to feel a psychological and spiritual need growing within us to be remembered.

The Baal Shem Tov is reputed to have said: "Forgetting is the true exile." Of course it is obvious that ignorance is the true partner of forgetfulness. In fact, if one never knew anything then one cannot be accused of having forgotten it. The Torah emphasizes the repetition of all the facts and experiences of Jewish life in the desert of Sinai so that this knowledge will enable and strengthen the powers of national remembrance.

Much of the Jewish world today suffers from a severe case of, hopefully temporary but nevertheless intense, amnesia. In spite of all of the efforts of the survivors, the museums, the academic courses and books relating to the Holocaust, this event is rapidly disappearing from world and even Jewish memory.

Religious Jewry has found no way, as of yet, to ritually remember the Holocaust. Without ritual and holiness, it tragically will continue to fade from the memory of the coming generation. In distributing films and audio lectures about the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel to Jewish schools worldwide I am already encountering apathy if not sometimes even outright opposition to the insertion of the subject into the curriculum of schools.

One principal asked me: "Will it help my students to be admitted

to Harvard or Yale?" And on the other end of the spectrum of Jewish education another principal told me: "Will it increase their ability to study Talmud properly?" I responded that the Torah listed all of the desert way stations even though knowing them would also not guarantee Talmudic proficiency or admission to Harvard or Yale.

It is not only the amnesia regarding even our very recent past that afflicts us. It is our inability to grasp that the knowledge of this immediate past is vitally essential to our present and to our future. Without knowledge of the events of the past, dating back all of the way to the events of the desert of Sinai, we are creating for our descendants a new desert, a wasteland of ignorance, falsehoods and disillusion. It is not too late to correct this. If our schools won't do so, let our homes and families, our grandparents attempt to do so

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth**

The Prophetic Voice

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha b'Av, as we recall the destruction of the Temples, we read three of the most searing passages in the prophetic literature, the first two from the opening of the book of Jeremiah, the third, next week, from the first chapter of Isaiah.

At perhaps no other time of the year are we so acutely aware of the enduring force of ancient Israel's great visionaries. The prophets had no power. They were not kings or members of the royal court. They were (usually) not priests or members of the

religious establishment. They held no office. They were not elected. Often they were deeply unpopular, none more so than the author of this week's haftara, Jeremiah, who was arrested, flogged, abused, put on trial and only narrowly escaped with his life. Only rarely were the prophets heeded in their lifetimes: the one clear exception was Jonah, and he spoke to non-Jews, the citizens of Nineveh. Yet their words were recorded for posterity and became a major feature of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. They were the world's first social critics and their message continues through the centuries. As Kierkegaard almost said: when a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies his influence begins. (Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins." Kierkegaard, Papers and Journals, 352.)

What was distinctive about the prophet was not that he foretold the future. The ancient world was full of such people: soothsayers, oracles, readers of runes, shamans and other diviners, each of whom claimed inside track with the forces that govern fate and "shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Judaism has no time for such people. The Torah bans one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Deut. 18: 10-11). It disbelieves such practices because it believes in human freedom. The future is not pre-scripted. It depends on us and the choices we make. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded; if a prophecy comes true it has failed. The prophet tells of the future that will happen if we do not heed the danger and mend our ways. He (or she – there were seven

biblical prophetesses) does not predict; he warns.

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

Several things made the prophets unique. The first was his or her sense of history. The prophets were the first people to see God in history. We tend to take our sense of time for granted. Time happens. Time flows. As the saying goes, time is God's way of keeping everything from happening at once. But actually there are several ways of relating to time and different civilizations have perceived it differently.

There is cyclical time: time as the slow turning of the seasons, or the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Cyclical time is time as it occurs in nature. Some trees have long lives; most fruit flies have short ones; but all that lives, dies. The species endures, individual members 'do not. Kohelet contains the most famous expression of cyclical time in Judaism: "The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course ... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then there is linear time: time as an inexorable sequence of cause and effect. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace gave this idea its most famous expression in 1814 when he said that if you "know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed," together with all the laws of physics and chemistry, then "nothing would be uncertain

and the future just like the past would be present" before your eyes. Karl Marx applied this idea to society and history. It is known as historical inevitability, and when transferred to the affairs of humankind it amounts to a massive denial of personal freedom.

Finally there is time as a mere sequence of events with no underlying plot or theme. This leads to the kind of historical writing pioneered by the scholars of ancient Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Each of these has its place, the first in biology, the second in physics, the third in secular history, but none was time as the prophets understood it. The prophets saw time as the arena in which the great drama between God and humanity was played out, especially in the history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish. If it was unfaithful it would fail. It would suffer defeat and exile. That is what Jeremiah never tired of telling his contemporaries.

The second prophetic insight was the unbreakable connection between monotheism and morality. Somehow the prophets sensed – it is implicit in all their words, though they do not explain it explicitly – that idolatry was not just false. It was also corrupting. It saw the universe as a multiplicity of powers that often clashed. The battle went to the strong. Might defeated right. The fittest survived while the weak perished. Nietzsche believed this, as did the social Darwinists.

The prophets opposed this with all their force. For them the power of God was secondary; what mattered was the righteousness of God. Precisely because God loved and had redeemed Israel,

Israel owed Him loyalty as their sole ultimate sovereign, and if they were unfaithful to God they would also be unfaithful to their fellow humans. They would lie, rob, cheat: Jeremiah doubts whether there was one honest person in the whole of Jerusalem (Jer. 5: 1). They would become sexually adulterous and promiscuous: "I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife" (Jer. 5: 7-8).

Their third great insight was the primacy of ethics over politics. The prophets have surprisingly little to say about politics. Yes, Samuel was wary of monarchy but we find almost nothing in Isaiah or Jeremiah about the way Israel/Judah should be governed. Instead we hear a constant insistence that the strength of a nation – certainly of Israel/Judah – is not military or demographic but moral and spiritual. If the people keep faith with God and one another, no force on earth can defeat them. If they do not, no force can save them. As Jeremiah says in this week's haftara, they will discover too late that their false gods offered false comfort:

They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth.' They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!' Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah. (Jer. 2: 27-28)

Jeremiah, the most passionate and tormented of all the prophets, has gone down in history as the prophet of doom. Yet this is

unfair. He was also supremely a prophet of hope. He is the man who said that the people of Israel will be as eternal as the sun, moon and stars (Jer. 31). He is the man who, while the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem, bought a field as a public gesture of faith that Jews would return from exile: "For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land" (Jer. 32).

Jeremiah's feelings of doom and hope were not in conflict: there were two sides of the same coin. The God who sentenced His people to exile would be the God who brought them back, for though His people might forsake Him, He would never forsake them. Jeremiah may have lost faith in people; he never lost faith in God.

Prophecy ceased in Israel with Haggai, Zekharia and Malachi in the Second Temple era. But the prophetic truths have not ceased to be true. Only by being faithful to God do people stay faithful to one another. Only by being open to a power greater than themselves do people become greater than themselves. Only by understanding the deep forces that shape history can a people defeat the ravages of history. It took a long time for biblical Israel to learn these truths, and a very long time indeed before they returned to their land, re-entering the arena of history. We must never forget them again

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their places of journeying by the mouth of Hashem"(33:2)

Moshe wrote at Hashem's command. "Said the Holy One blessed is He to Moshe: Write the journeys that Israel journeyed in the Wilderness in order that they know the miracles that I performed for them" (Bamidbar Rabbah 23:1). Even though here nothing more than the mere journeys are mentioned, without relating the miracles. Yet this alone was a major miracle, that they journeyed to this place and then to another place and thus they continued without starvation and mishap. And each place provided them opportunities to be patient and to gain perfection by proper self control and patience.

Rabbenu Yonah (Shaare Teshuba 3:17) wrote of "the importance of remembering Hashem's kindnesses and meditating on them, as was said "You shall remember all the journey" (Debarim 8:2). Thus by reading the narration of the journeys in the Wilderness we perform an important commandment to remember Hashem's kindness.

Rabbenu Yonah teaches that this commandment requires us to look back and examine our life's journeys to recognize Hashem's kindness to each of us individually. In one's journey through life, many perils and illnesses and misfortunes and evil influences hovered nearby, even though he was totally unaware of them.

And Hashem continued to protect him as he journeyed from childhood to adolescence and on to adult maturity. He must be Grateful also for the continued well-being of his wife and children, and he must always be aware of the tragedies that others had suffered, but from which he had been protected by Hashem.

This is the method of utilizing commandments to the nation in general as admonitions for the individual.

And like our Nation today, we too shall look back and understand that it was all done "to do good for you in your end" (Debarim 8:16)

"Remembering Hashem's Kindnesses in Your life" 30 seconds every night before retiring

Some benefits are:

- * Fulfilling a Positive Torah Mitzvah
- * Increased Awareness of the Divine guiding Hand
- * Increased Emunah & Bitachon/Trust in Hashem
- * Appreciation & Gratitude for what we received

Quoted from "Journey Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller Z'TL

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: