

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

MATOT-MASEI

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 2:4-28, 3:4, 4:1-2

JULY 22-23, 2017 28 TAMUZ 5777

Rosh Hodesh Ab will be celebrated on Monday, July 24.

No meat meals are permitted (except for Shabbat) from Monday night, July 24 until Wednesday night, Aug 2.

It is also forbidden to buy or wear new clothing on these days.

DEDICATION: Refuah Shelema for Elisheva Bat Esther

In Memory of Moshe Ben Victoria – Moe Gindi and of Victoria Bat Rosa – Victoria Gindi 1 AB

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EDITORS NOTES

We read this week, Vaydaber Hashem El Moshe Nekom Nikmat - Hashem gives Moses a final task, Achar TeAsef El Amecha. And explains - After you complete it you will be gathered onto your people above. This week, my uncle Moses Ben David Gindi HaKohen, Moshe Ben Victoria, Moe Gindi, was gathered to his people.

We have a purpose when attending a funeral or memorial service. We pay respects to the menucha – the one who passed on. We comfort the relatives on their loss. We shed tears which help to open the heavenly gates for the rising soul and we eulogize, recalling stories and lessons to inspire ourselves and others. And when we walk out the door, we need to be inspired to make changes and grow.

In the second verse of the second portion we read this week, the pasuk tells us: Vayichtob Moshe ET MoSaEhem LeMasEhem - Moshe will write down their experiences according to their journeys. Al Pi Hashem - According to the word of Hashem. And the verse concludes. VeEleh MasEhem LeMoSaEhem - That these are their journeys according to their experiences.

One has to ask why the words are reversed within the same verse. Which is it? People typically experience things from their journeys. So what does the opposite mean? How are we to understand journeys of their experience?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky tells a legend which I heard many times from my Rabbi.

The story is told about the Rabbi known as the Toldos Aharon. He was sitting at his table with one of his Chasidim. After a very long while, the sexton brought a bowl of beautiful fruit to the table. It was quite appealing and the Rebbe noticed the sparkle in the eye of the hungry patron. The Rebbe invited his disciple to make a blessing over the shiny crimson apple.

The guest declared that such a beautiful fruit was worthy of a beautiful blessing and he resolved to make a blessing with his entire heart one truly befitting this marvelous creation. The student stood up, held the apple in both his hands, and spent a few minutes contemplating the delicious fruit that Hashem had created. His eyes sparkled in anticipation, which enthused him even more. Carefully he annunciated every word of the blessing. Swaying back and forth he began, "Baruch Atah, Blessed art Thou . . ."

After what must have been the most eloquent blessing the man ever recited, he bit excitedly into the delicious fruit, and after swallowing, he once again praised the beautiful taste and appearance.

The man seemed to revel in his act of spirituality, and the Rebbe knew he had to explain something to him.

"You made a beautiful bracha my dear disciple," he began. "Now I will teach you the difference between your blessing and the blessing of a complete tzadik."

"You saw the fruit. You wanted to eat it. But alas, one is not allowed to eat a fruit without a blessing over it. And so you made a most beautiful blessing. It is truly commendable.

"A complete tzadik, however, does not have his mind set on fruit. He wants to bless Hashem for his beautiful handiwork. But alas, one is not allowed to make that blessing without partaking in the pleasure of His handiwork. And so he looks for a fruit. When he finds the fruit, he is now ready to make the blessing he had long waited to make."

Rabbi Abittan told us that most of us bless to eat, but there are the few special ones who only eat in order to bless.

For most of us, our experiences are governed by the journey. We become subject to the road of life and react to it often with scripts dictated by our past. Some complain and use the excuse of genes and home life, others base it on the neighborhood and society where they grew up and still others lay the blame on the stars or their so called destiny.

But there are the few special ones whose journey is governed by their experience. These are people whose presence changes reality and whose strength and conviction create new paths whether through earth, stone, water or space.

My uncle Moe Gindi was one of those special ones. He was a hero to me. He was larger than life and for most of his life he dictated the journey.

He had this uncanny ability to walk into a room and change the mood by his mere presence. And he had three tools in his arsenal.

He was a master at making people laugh. He knew the right joke for each situation, whether appropriate or sometimes perhaps inappropriate. The Talmud tells us that one who makes others laugh has a free pass into heaven.

He was a master of song. He could ascend the bimah as chazzan where he knew every pizmon of every maqam for every tefilah. He even created his own tunes which are used til today in Beth Torah for Ubah LeSion and Yimloch and which they will sing in his memory this coming Shabbat on Lawrence Avenue. And then there were the songs he composed telling us, "On 65th Street that's where I met her", and those he reconfigured for the community like, "Once I owned a candy store".

Perhaps his greatest tool was his ability to make conversation and put people at ease. He could talk to anyone from scholar to child. It was a gift! And we all want to see the TV show where he convinced a panel of experts that he was Henry Slomanski, International karate champion.

In everything that he did and everything that he took on from the building of Beth Torah and Lawrence Avenue Synagogue to creation of Mikdash Melech where Rabbi Benoliel got uncle Moe and my dad to partner, he was proof that life truly is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

We saw it in his family life where he placed his amazing wife Grace as the most beautiful wife a man could have on this pedestal. And along side her, he placed his three princesses, each of his daughters. And he treated each of his grandchildren and great grandchildren as the apples of his eye. The rabbis teach, He who loves his wife as himself and honors her more than himself, and leads his children in the right path, and marries them while they are young, to him we can apply the words of Iyov, "Then you shall know that there is peace in your tent" Which Rashi explains that wherever you are, you will be confident that all is well in your tent. I know my uncle can look down from the Olam HaEmet and know that through his efforts Hashem will fulfill his promise.

My uncle lives on through his children and grandchildren and through us. How can we insure that?

By taking these lessons and incorporating them into our own lives. If you knew Moe Gindi, it is impossible to ever forget him.

And if we didn't we can still be inspired. We can ask ourselves: Will we allow our experience to be governed by the road or will we through our efforts govern life?

Each of us can be like uncle Moe and incorporate the tools of laughter, song, conversation and love for our fellow man into our own lives. We need to be inspired by him especially when we face our own challenges and the challenges my uncle faced through his illness these last few years were to say the least very difficult.

Remember Moe Gindi

Never quit!
Never give up!
Know that anything is possible!

Tehi Nafsho Serurah BeSror HaChayim

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

PS... Rabbi Mansour, Rabbi Ozeri and Rabbi Azancot all spoke of Moe Gindi's respect for the rabbis and someone wondered at the source. I believe that this was a quality shared by most of that generation. Still my uncle had an advantage. His own uncle with whom he shared his name, Haham Moshe Gindi, was not only respected by all, he was revered by the entire community as one of their rabbis and especially their own mekubal who is reported to have

done many wondrous and unexplainable acts. We all know that sometimes it's easier to revere someone from afar and often those closest to a person take a person for granted and readily see his faults. This was not so in the home of our grandparents David and Victoria Gindi. They had tremendous respect and demanded no less from their own children and we saw it in how each of them lived their lives. Many remarked how amazing it was that all my uncles' grandchildren are truly benai torah setting aside time daily for serious learning. But perhaps this is in merit of their grandfather's support of Torah and the Rabbis. For those who support the Torah can rest assured that the Torah will come to support them.

THE RAV KOOK SYNAGOGUE

A new synagogue community in Jerusalem is reviving one of Jerusalem's most significant Beit Kneset and Beit Midrash of modern Jewish history. Beit HaRav Kook is the home and Beit HaMidrash/Beit HaKneset that was built for Rabbi Avraham Itzchak HaCohen Kook TZ'L when he became the Chief Rabbi of Eretz Israel in 1921. Festively opened in 1923 it is the birthplace of Torat Eretz Israel and the spiritual rebirth that Rav Kook led. Regular tefillot ended there in 1965 when the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva moved to its current location in Kiryat Moshe.

Kehilat Bet HaRav Kook began weekly Kabbalat Shabbat tefillot on Rav Kook's 79th Yaartzeit and now as we approach his 82nd Yaartzeit it is holding complete Shabbat tefillot. Kabbalat Shabbat begins with Mincha 20 minutes after candle-lighting, Shabbat Shacharit is at 9am and Shabbat Mincha is 90 minutes before the end of Shabbat and is followed by Seudat Shlishit and Maariv.

The dovening is authentic celebratory Carlebach. There was a close relationship between Rav Kook's son- Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda, TZ'L and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach Z'L.

The address is Rav Kook Street 9 in the centre of Jerusalem.

For further details, please contact the gabbai-Rabbi Itzchak at 0548192391.

Summary of the Perasha

In this week's Parasha we see a beautiful lesson from Moshe Rabenu's conversation with the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Benei Israel just defeated Midyan and they are on the path to conquering the land of Israel. Reuben and Gad approach Moshe telling him

that they have a lot of cattle and they would prefer to inherit the land outside of Israel as it is better for grazing. They tell Moshe that they'd like to stay where they are and build pens for their cattle and cities for their children. Moshe rebukes them that they don't want to come and fight for the land of Israel and after a long back and forth Reuben and Gad say they will come help Benei Israel conquer the land in order to inherit the land outside of Israel. Moshe agrees to give them the land responding back that they should build cities for their children and pens for their cattle. Reuben and Gad agree saying they will do as Moshe said and take care of their children, wives, and cattle.

And without a close eye we may not pick up on the depth of the back and forth between Moshe and the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Perek 32, Pasook 16 where Reuben and Gad said they wanted to stay and build pens for their cattle and cities for their children Rashi explains that Reuben and Gad were guilty of making the ikar tafel and the tafel ikar (they made the primary secondary and the secondary primary). Rashi explains they cared more about their money than their families and that is evident from the way they prioritized their words. They first said they would build pens for their cattle and only then that they would build cities for their families. And if we take note, Moshe's response back to them is really a rebuke. He changed the order putting the cities before the pens. He was telling them that they need to get their priorities straight. And as we see Reuben and Gad received the rebuke as in their response they listed their children first.

I took two things away from this story. First we see the depth of our beautiful Torah. That if we pay close attention there can be a whole story beneath the general story of the text. Every letter in the Torah has meaning. There are no extra words and even the order of certain words has significance and can be coming to send us a message of how to live our lives. Second, we see a great lesson of priorities. Sometimes we get caught up in our busy work lives and it is hard for us to make time for our families. It becomes hard to spend time with our children, have meaningful conversations with them, and to just be around and be all there mentally so that we can notice when things are going in the wrong direction. Let us take the mussar of Moshe and remember where we want the focus in our lives to be!

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

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 were 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 journeys, Israel is divided among Benei Israel (year 40 in the midbar)

- 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 Slaphchad's land will be lost to other tribes if his daughters marry out of their tribe

The Ir Miqlat and The Run of Your Life

Rabbi Meyer Laniado

Have you ever made a mistake or a decision that made you feel unredeemable? Have you ever been up late nights tossing and turning worrying? The individual introduced to us in our perasha, the *horeg bishgaga*, slipped on his way down a ladder, taking the life of a passerby. He will understandably be devastated and traumatized. Blood is on his head, and a family member of the deceased will likely try to avenge the loss. What does the Torah teach us about mistakes, even egregious ones? What attitude should we have?

The *horeg bishgaga* and the *ir miqlat*, the city of refuge, serve as an example. The *horeg bishgaga* does not seem to have done anything wrong, he simply fell, but the *gemara* in *Makkot* expounds on the story of the *horeg bishgaga*, explaining that neither were altogether blameless.

"...He [God], appoints them both [to meet] at the same inn; he who had slain with intent sits under the step-ladder, and he who had slain in error comes down the step-ladder, falls and kills him. Thus, he who had slain

with intent is [duly] slain, while he who had slain in error [duly] goes into *galut* (Tbavli Makkot 10b)."

The background of the tragedy, according to this *gemara*, is divine justice. The one killed was deserving of punishment, and since he escaped punishment by a human court, possibly due to a lack of testimony, was sentenced by God. The *horeg bishgaga*, on the other hand, was a messenger who fulfilled God's decree, *vehaElohim ina leyado*, God brought [it] about into his hand (Shemot 21:13). Although he was chosen for this task, he requires *kapara*, atonement (35:33 and Tbavli Makkot 2b). He is not without fault. He is not an *onus*, completely innocent since it was not completely unforeseen and out of his control, he is a *horeg bishgaga*, an unintentional killer, and is therefore somewhat accountable. He should recognize that he is not a murderer, who with proper testimony would have been killed by the court, or someone who was grossly negligent, who would not have had the opportunity of having *ir miqlat* protect him. His life has taken him down this road, and he must reflect why he was 'chosen' for this mission. The *gemara* in *makkot* asks the question:

Why would God cause one [*the horeg bishgaga*] to sin in this manner? The verse states: "As the ancient parable says: From the wicked comes forth wickedness" (I Samuel 24:13). Evil incidents befall those who have already sinned.

With his freewill, he has chosen to transgress and has found himself in this situation. The *gemara* above continues stating:

From the Torah, from the Prophets, and from the Writings one learns that along the path a person wishes to proceed, He [God] leads and assists him.

Our Hakhamim are explaining to us that there is a reason why this tragedy happened through him. He was not completely blameless and has been on a negative trajectory. He may or may not have realized his transgressions until this calamity jolted him. Now is his opportunity to rectify his actions. The goal is for him to live, as the *hakhamim* explain. His Rabbi goes into *galut*, to the *ir miqlat*, with him so that he can live by the waters of his teacher's Torah.

When a Torah scholar is exiled to a city of refuge, his teacher is exiled together with him. This is derived from Deuteronomy 19:5, which states: "He shall flee to one of these cities, and he shall live." Implied, is that everything necessary for his life must be provided for him. Therefore, a scholar must be provided with his teacher, for the life of one who possesses knowledge without

Torah study is considered to be death (Rambam Hilkhoh Roseah 7:1).

The purpose of the *ir miqlat* is to physically protect the *horeg bishgaga*, and also, to preserve his spiritual life. He is to live amongst the wisest and noble men of the nation and experience a city that does not define him as a murderer, helping him to not view himself as a failure, and thereby understand that there is room for growth. One who defines himself as a bad person, or does not see their self-worth, will have a difficult time progressing.

Once accepted as part of the Levite city he will be open to emulating their perspectives and values. "Perhaps their land [the Levite city], hallowed by their [Leviyim's] holiness, would affect atonement for him (Sefer haHinukh 408)." The Leviyim are the teachers and role models. "They will teach Your judgments to Ya'aqob and Your Torah to Yisrael (Debarim 33:10)." The hope is that the *horeg bishgaga's* new Levite community will have an effect on him and help him change his perspective and values to become more sensitive to the ramifications of his actions, and take more care, even if there is only a small possibility of loss of life.

There are some errors we cannot undo, *meuvat lo yukhal litkon*, what is crooked cannot be straightened (Qohelet 1:15), such as those committed by the *horeg bishgaga*, but after they have happened, we should view them as a divine message, learn from them and grow. Most mistakes are not nearly as severe as the one of the *horeg bishgaga*. We should not find ourselves paralyzed by our mistakes, reviewing the scene over and over again, telling ourselves we are a failure or we are not good enough. We should view the error as a message from God about where we could improve. We should reflect to learn the lessons, surround ourselves with role models, embody their lessons, progress and thank God for His guidance.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Meyer Laniado

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"Take vengeance for the Children of Israel from the Midianites, afterwards you will be brought in unto your people (Bemidbar 31:2)

The Midrash Rabbah (22:6) states, "Our Sages say that it is stated in the book of Yehoshua (1:5), 'The way I was with Moshe, I will be with you,' and Yehoshua was supposed to live 120 years like Moshe Rabenu. But why was his life shortened by 10 years? When Hashem told Moshe, "Take vengeance..." he was told that he would die after that, and still he did not delay. On the contrary, he immediately sent the men to war. But Yehoshua,

when it came time to do battle with the 31 kings in the Land of Canaan, said, "If I kill them right away, I will die right away like it happened to Moshe." What did he do? He delayed the war, as it says, "Many days did Yehoshua make war with these kings." Hashem said to him, "Since you did this, I will cut your life short by 10 years." King Solomon said (Mishle 19), "Many are the thoughts of the heart of man, but the advice of Hashem will stand."

It is clear that Yehoshua delayed the war for the sake of Hashem. He wanted to live longer to fulfill more misvot and to be able to guide the Jewish people on the right path. Yehoshua was afraid that the nation will not observe the Torah after his death, as Moshe forecasted by saying, "I know that after I die, the Jews will become corrupt and veer off the path that I commanded them, and evil things will happen to them at the end of days.(Debarim 31:29). Rashi explains that the pasuk is referring to the time after yehoshua, because "all the time that Yehoshua was alive, it was if Moshe was alive. If so, the question is: Why was Yehoshua penalized 10 years? His intention was noble!

We must conclude that the law is: Zerizin makdimin lemisvot – the zealous do their religious duty as early as possible (Shabbat 20a). When one has a misvahto do, he should not delay. Even though Yehoshua had good intentions, he should not have delayed the misvah of going to war, even though it was with the desire of securing a better future for the Jewish nation. Hashem is the One responsible for the welfare of the Jewish people. If He wants the nation to continue to perform on a higher spiritual level, He can do it without the help of Yehoshua. And if He does not want to uphold the nation to perform on a higher level, all the efforts of Yehoshua will not help. On the contrary, his efforts caused him to pass away before his time.

A person is obligated to follow the laws of Shulhan Aruch without trying to make calculations of what would be better for the future of the world.

Shabbat Shalom Rabbi Reuven Semah

When the tribes of Gad and Reuben asked for permission to inherit their portion of Israel on the Eastern bank of the Jordan River, Moshe suspected them of wanting to shirk their responsibility in conquering the land of Israel. They then told Moshe Rabenu, "We will build corrals for our sheep and cities for our children and leave them alone, and we will go fight together with our brethren." Moshe acceded to their request and commanded them to first build cities for their children and then to take care of their animals.

Rashi points out that Moshe Rabenu was chastising them in a subtle way. He was telling them, first you have to care for your children and then your

livestock. Although it seems like a simple thing to us, not even worthy of mention, we should reflect on our own lives and see if we don't sometimes forget this lesson. During our busy season, do we make time for our families or is the business the overwhelming consideration? If we have to travel often on business, does our home life pay the price? When we plan our excursions and outings on our days off, do we realize that our children might be second fiddle to our ball games? Let's keep our priorities straight! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Gambler

Do you gamble? Some people say that they don't – but actually, they do “bet” against themselves every day. Due to fear of failure, many people avoid taking on challenges and grabbing opportunities to accomplish great things. They crush their self-image into a small, compact size and say “I can't,” even when there is the possibility that they really “can.”

In order to succeed in life, people must feel that they can succeed. Rabbi Berel Wein says, “The defense mechanism of self-denigration cripples us from taking advantage of the opportunities that life constantly presents. A person must...[choose] the right way for oneself, and not...the easy and non-challenging path.”

The truth is that there are many things, goals, ideals, and challenges that are beyond our reach. Yes, there are things one really cannot do. It is okay to say “I can't” when one of those situations occurs. The danger arises when “I can't” becomes a general approach rather than a response to a single set of circumstances. Adopting a poor attitude and view of life is what we must avoid.

When you are confronted with a difficult challenge, stop and ask yourself, “Can I do it?” If your answer is negative, then think again. “Do I want to forfeit the game, or wouldn't I rather play and maybe – just maybe – I might win.” In a few valuable minutes you can absorb Rabbi Wein's conclusion that “Perhaps not everyone can climb to the top of the mountain, but certainly no one should willingly choose to remain at the bottom of the hill because of the fear of not reaching the top.” (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Words Are Not Cheap**

Parashat Matot begins with the subject of Nedarim – vows. There are 613 Mitzvot in the Torah, and nobody can ever add another Mitzva. 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 starting 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.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

**Will be distributed under a separate list
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Rabbi Wein HOT SUMMERS

This summer in Israel appears to be an especially hot one. Of course, the average person is unable to remember past summers, as to what the weather actually was and therefore all comparisons are very subjective. However our only weather bureau has statistics that trace weather patterns over the past century and therefore their comparisons contain some merit.

It appears that the weather here, like in other parts of the world, goes in cycles. And we are apparently currently involved in a hot summer cycle. Though the Bible does not mention weather conditions per se, I can imagine that when it says that our father Abraham was sitting by his tent in the heat of the day this did not happen during the winter months.

So, hot summers here have been around for a long time. King Solomon in Shir Hashirim references the fact that it is during the winter months that rain falls here in Israel but that beginning in late spring the rains depart and do not return again until the autumn season. This is pretty much a constant in our country. Everyone plans outdoor events in the summer months, confident that there will be no rain to mar or interrupt the proceedings.

Weather patterns here in our country are rather predictable and hot summers and somewhat wet winters are the expected norm. Naturally with the advent of air conditioning throughout Israel over the past few decades, the hot summers are much more bearable than they were for our ancestors centuries and millennia ago.

Human beings are very adaptable to all of the varied climates that exist on our planet. Human beings inhabit the frozen tundra of the extreme poles of the earth as well as the equatorial jungles with their high heat and humidity. Human beings are desert dwellers, mountain dwellers and swamp inhabitants. One of the great miracles of human life and civilization is the uncanny ability of humans to adapt and adjust to all types of climates and conditions.

It was one of the blessings that the Lord bestowed upon humankind when God gave the human race the

ability to exploit the planet for human benefit. Climate moderation and good weather are naturally desirable conditions for pleasant living. However there are many more factors that go into choosing where one resides and makes his or her home.

The whole world cannot and does not wish to live in Florida or California. But one has to admit that in the cold winters of the northern hemisphere the migration to Florida and California is understandable, if not even desirable. Here in Israel, the summer is when literally millions of Israelis travel abroad for vacation and other reasons. Sometimes it feels like the whole country is emptying out for a short period of time. But there are hot summers everywhere in the world now so the wanderlust is not so much due to weather as it is simply the desire for a change of scenery and for new inspiration and strength.

The famous aphorism of Mark Twain, that everyone talks about the weather but no one can do anything about it, certainly applies regarding our hot summers. The hot summers have made iced coffee somewhat of a national drink. For years, Israel like England was unaccustomed to the use of ice in its drinks. However in this area of life, as in many other matters here in Israel, the American influence has slowly prevailed, Ice cold drinks are now the norm and not the exception and there is no necessity to ask a bewildered waiter to please bring you ice for the table.

How great this accomplishment is on the scale of human benefit is a matter that is still left open for debate and contemplation. Nevertheless, it certainly makes a hot summer more bearable and provides temporary relief from the heat. We are warned constantly to drink many liters of water every day so that we do not become dehydrated. I remember as a child in Chicago that the summers there were also very hot but that no one ever insisted that we drink a lot of water; but that probably was because we were medically ignorant then and were not overly concerned about becoming dehydrated.

Of course drinking a lot of water has other effects on our body, so moderation in this area as in all other areas of life, is certainly wise and healthy. I am certain that in the cold of December we will fondly recall the heat of this summer and look forward to its return for next year.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks 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 haftarah, 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.[1]

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 or she 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 civilisations 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 haftarah, 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.

[1] Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins." Kierkegaard, Papers and Journals, 352.

Rav Kook on the Perasha

God commanded Moses to attack Midian in revenge for their devastating scheme against the Israelites. The Midianites had used their daughters to lure the Israelite men into worshipping the licentious idolatry of Peor, resulting in Divine anger and a terrible plague.

The war against Midian was a remarkable success — not a single soldier fell. After the battle, the generals and captains approached Moses:

"We wish to bring an offering to God. Every man who found a gold article — an anklet, bracelet, ring, earring, body ornament — to atone for our souls before God." (Num. 31:50)

The officers had followed God's command, waging war against Midian. Why did they feel a need for atonement?

The Sin of the Soldiers

The Sages explained that while the soldiers committed no actual transgressions, they were not free of improper thoughts. Rabbi Ishmael expressed this idea with an intriguing phrase, saying that "their eyes feasted on the immodest sights" (Shabbat 64a-b).

When the soul's inner sense of holiness is healthy and robust, it will not absorb decadent and degrading sights. Such visual stimuli are inconsistent with the overall makeup of the soul and will be promptly rejected.

If, on the other hand, the soul has failed to retain its pristine purity, then it will lack an orderly defense against defiling images. Improper sights will have a negative impact on one's emotional and imaginative faculties, and will generate turmoil within the soul.

Rabbi Ishmael described this phenomenon as a 'feast' of the eyes. To feast or derive nourishment indicates that there exists a natural connection between the food and the living organism eating that food. The soldiers were not immune to the sights of Midian. The images of the Midianite women and their flashy ornaments found a place in their souls, and "their eyes feasted on the immodest sights."

True, the soldiers did not act upon these stimuli; but the very fact that they were drawn to them indicated that they were in need of atonement and spiritual cleansing.

Superficial Attraction

The gold ornaments were an apt metaphor for the corrupting deception that confronted the soldiers in Midian. The Sages wrote that the body ornaments were formed into lewd shapes. The golden pieces of jewelry lured the eye with their dazzling exterior of glittering beauty. Their influence was a function of the magnetism of their superficial attraction. On the inside, however, their true essence remained, crude and repulsive.

(adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 114-116)