

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TISA

Haftarah: Melachim I 18:20-39

MARCH 10, 2012

16 ADAR 5772

DEDICATIONS : In memory of Lillian Bat Esther

**Mazal Tov to Allen and Shoshana Pilevsky on the birth of a baby girl, who on Purim received the name Esther.
Mazal Tov to their children Adam and Chava Sprung and the entire family.**

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION NOTES

Mazal tov to Uri and Tina Lemberger on the birth of a granddaughter to their children Ephri and Stella

Thank you to Sarina Amiel for organizing a wonderful purim evening. Thank you to Sam Shetrit for helping with the entertainment, Phyllis Wagner for making her special soup and Barbara Levy for buying the graggers. Special thank you to Mrs. Barbara Halio for sponsoring the event in memory of her husband Dr. Solomon Halio.

Thank you to Herman and Rebecca Ovadia for organizing and taking care of our purim card project. It was a great success! Thanks to all who participated and thank you to Chantelle for the wonderful idea!

Karen Cohn brought a book, The Five Megillot and Jonah, to shul on erev Purim. She writes, "I think I left it near the coat room. The book has an orange book jacket, frayed at the edges, and the name on the inside flap is Ricki Zide. The book belongs to my sister." If anyone knows where it is, please let Karen know. Thank you!

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY NIGHT

- Mincha at 5:40 – Followed by Kabbalat Shabbat and Arbit (Candle Lighting: 5:38)

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

- Shaharith: 9:00 followed by Kidush (Please say Shema by 8:30AM at home)
- Kiddush this week has no sponsor. Care to sponsor ... let us know.
- Benai Asher Youth Program
 - Mincha following Kiddush – Amidah not before 12:35
 - Women's Learning Group 4:15 Alternating speakers, seudat shlishit served, at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive. Class is always cancelled if there is inclement weather.
 - Arbit at 7:00pm followed by Havdalah – Shabbat ends at 6:38pm
 - Childrens Movie with Pizza after Havdalah – around 7:30PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

WE MOVE THE CLOCK FORWARD FOR SPRING AT 1:00 AM so we were asked for this Sunday only Shaharit at 9:00

- Shaharit Sunday 9:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

- "Mystical Torah Insights" 9:00 – 9:30 Sunday Mornings with breakfast with David Bibi or Rabbi Colish
- Kosher Kitchen Series 9:30AM – Led by Rabbi Colish –
- "Pathway to G-d" Mon-Fri 6:30 AM – based upon the Ramchal's Derech Hashem with Rabbi Colish
- Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav –
- "Sephardic Women's Prayer" Tuesday nights at the Bibi's @ 8PM with Rabbi Colish. - deep insights, simple translations and a how to guide.

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

With much regret we would like to inform you of the passing of Gloria Tawil A"H - wife of Rafe Tawil. Gloria was the mother of Ely Tawil, Steve Tawil, Leslie Sultan and Michelle Serouya. She was the sister of Fritzi Laniado, Zuzy Bijou, Renna Abadi, and Joe Chira A"H. The funeral is taking place this morning. The family will be sitting shiva at Mr Tawil's home at The Cove. 717 Ocean Ave. Long Branch. NJ. Penthouse 10.

Editors Notes

They say it's impossible to be in two places at once. Even Moses couldn't pull that one off. Just imagine if he could have been in Heaven and on earth simultaneously. No Golden Calf, No broken tablets. No request for forgiveness. Every Rabbi would have to rewrite his speech for this Shabbat.

This was the dilemma that Chantelle and I faced last weekend. On the one hand we been invited to join Rabbi Lawrence Keleman and about six dozen members of his Vaad in Pennsylvania. On the other hand, our synagogue had organized a Friday night meal for Shabbat across America and we were now expecting more than 100 people.

But when you have a real partner, you can share responsibilities and each take on that which is more suited to you. (Wow that could be a great sermon, "Did Moses have a true Partner?") So Chantelle took Aryana to the Vaad Shabbaton and Moses, Mariyah and my niece Jessie stayed at the beach.

And although we were more than one hundred miles apart and 100

miles and in somewhat different worlds, strangely enough the messages of the weekend that we walked away with were shockingly similar. As we talked Saturday night and I told them what we had spoken about at Friday night and again on Shabbat, Aryana marveled that she heard almost exactly the same themes in the midst of the Pocono mountains.

NJOP under the direction of Rabbi Buchwald who I have known and admired for many years advertises the evening with the line, "Turn an ordinary Friday night into something extraordinary!". They continue, "That's the magic of Shabbat Across America and Canada. By participating in this continent wide event, you will not only have the opportunity to experience Shabbat, but you will be sharing your experience with tens of thousands of Jews across North America.

With the help of Rabbi Colish who liaised with NJOP and under the direction of some extraordinary women in our Synagogue and about a dozen families who sponsored the event allowing us to invite everyone without charging, reservations quickly took every available seat in our social hall. The key was to get people who had no connection to Shabbat and at least a dozen unaffiliated people joined us along with some families who were connected but for whom Friday night was just another night of the week.

A few days before I asked people to think about what Shabbat meant to them and to try to give over a short thought in a couple of minutes. My daughter Mariyah started us off and she walked the room motivating others to stand and share.

Many spoke of the importance of disconnecting from the world. One person referred to Emanuel Feldman's article we posted last week. There he quotes the Times story which mentions a \$2,285.00 per night hotel perched atop the Big Sur cliffs in California, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Part of its amenities: there are no TVs in the rooms. "People come there for the stillness and the quiet. The next big thing in the travel industry, he writes, are "black hole resorts" which are extremely expensive.

Imagine paying \$2285 a night? We have Shabbat every week where we get to shut down, reboot and reenergize.

Others spoke of the family connection. Friday night is the one night during our week where everyone is home and sitting together, "no matter what". It is the one night when we eat dinner as a family without the blackberry buzzing, facebook beckoning, twitter tweeting or a plethora of the images of our children's friends sitting on the kitchen computer screen all in some group ichtat. The one night we can talk with no distractions. Statistics tell us that this alone can prevent so many modern problems that plague our children.

After hearing the many people speak I mentioned that I was always confused by the statement of the Tannaim that Shabbat is "meeyn olam haba" - a small degree of the experience of the next world. I hear chasidim saying, "come to my house and you will experience it". I came and I felt I was missing something. But listening to everyone I realized that when it comes to Shabbat, we cut the rope that binds us to our work, our electronics, the advertisers, our 24/7 environment and with it we bind ourselves to

our families, to our friends and to that which is really important.

Many who have left this world or have come close to leaving it or witnessed a loved one dying can attest to the fact the truth in the saying that, "No one on their deathbed ever said, 'I wish I spent more time at work.'" Remember the song. Cats in a Cradle, where he repeats, "when you coming home dad, I don't know when ..." Shabbat is the antidote. Shabbat stresses that which is important. Shabbat teaches us what blessing really means. And I realized that I actually could understand finally begin to understand where Shabbat is a piece of the world to come.

We had a beautiful walk home even though it was raining. We appreciated that the wind was coming from the east and so the rain was hitting our backs instead of our faces. And we talked as we circled the growing puddles.

The next morning back at the Synagogue so many people spoke of how wonderful the evening before was. How the newcomers were so moved and how they intended on making Shabbat a part of their life.

I typically don't prepare speech, but on Shabbat morning while the Torah is read I use my Mikraot Gedolot Chumash – a Bible with many commentaries on the page – and consider while looking at the verses and in the breaks between those being called for an aliyah what I might speak about. This Shabbat though, I was asked if one of the young men, a Torah scholar could speak instead of me as it was the Yahrzeit of his grandfather so I never considered what I might discuss. Then as the prayers ended the young man came over to me and asked me if I thought he was going to speak. I told him that I was looking forward

to it. He responded that he wasn't feeling well and couldn't.

I turned to those who sit near me in the corner and asked, "anyone have any ideas". Last Shabbat was Shabbat Zachor when we recall the attack by Amalek on the Israelites shortly after the departed Egypt. Dr. Bellehsen reminded me of the numerical value of Amalek, of the word Remember and the number we get when we subtract one from the other. With that a thought came to mind. I recalled an article I had seen written by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Weinreib. I had perused it quickly at a red light on my way home and emailed it to my son Moses asking him to print it. Unfortunately I didn't get to read it again. But it so impressed me that I wove it into the numerical value of Amalek.

The Rabbis teach that the numerical value of Amalek (240) is identical to that of the word for "doubt" (safek). Amalek attacks the mind and the inner point of faith in God innate in the Divinely-inspired intelligence of the Jewish soul. Amalek is also represented in the evil snake of the Garden of Eden and the venom of Amalek seeks to cause the soul to "lose its mind."

Rabbi Weinreib wrote, If you have raised a child, you have had this experience. Your little boy or girl came home from school with a sample of his or her artwork. To you it just looked like a hodge-podge of scribbles, random color smears. But your child exclaimed, "Look, Mommy, it is a picture of the trees and fields that we pass on the way to grandma's house." Or, "Wow, Daddy! I drew the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky!"

What do you do with the picture? What most of us would do, and certainly what my wife and I did

many times with our kids, is to tell them how beautiful the picture is, how it looks just like what they describe it to be, and then post it on the refrigerator door or some other prominent place, then show it off for all to see.

Imagine how devastating it is, on the other hand, if the child gleefully brings his work of art to the parents attention only to have the parents say, "Ugh! What an ugly picture! It's just a bunch of smudges on paper! It doesn't look at all like a forest or field! Sun and moon and stars, no way!"

Such a parent has extinguished the poor child's exuberance. By cruelly scoffing at the youngster's attempt to produce a work of art, the parent has seriously harmed the child's self-esteem. The parents had an opportunity to deliver words of encouragement which would have had a long-term impact. Instead, they instilled in the child a lack of self-confidence which may very well have left a lifelong scar.

The Jewish tradition condemns the scoffer and sees in cynicism a powerful destructive force.

What, you may ask, does this have to do with this week's Torah readings? Let me explain. Although the primary Torah portion this week is Parshat Tezaveh (Exodus 27:2-30:10), we also will be reading an additional selection, and a very important one at that.

... This week is Parshat Zachor, where we read the story of Amalek's treacherous attack upon the people of Israel as they marched through the wilderness (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). Amalek's cowardly attack is to be remembered for all generations. There are many views as to what was so dastardly about his actions. Indeed, he is often

portrayed in our tradition as the precursor to the genocidal murderers, the Hamans and Hitlers, of our tragic history.

... Amalek is the ultimate scoffer, the paradigm of cynicism. He is described as "asher karcha", usually translated as "the one who 'surprised you,' or 'happened upon you,' on the road as you left Egypt." (Deuteronomy 25:18)

But Rashi offers other explanations, one of which is quite fascinating. Rashi suggests that "asher karcha" can mean "he who cooled you off," and he offers the metaphor of a seething cauldron or tub of boiling water, which Amalek cooled off by jumping into it.

The seething cauldron can be a metaphor for either the fear with which the other witnessing nations were overcome, which was dissipated by Amalek's precedent. Alternatively, it can be a metaphor for the bubbling enthusiasm of the triumphant Jewish people, which was diminished, perhaps permanently, by the effects of Amalek's attack.

Rabbi Isaac Hutner, in his posthumously published essays on Purim, takes the latter approach. "The Jewish people," he writes, "were full of a spiritual energy and optimism that was dimmed by the scoffer Amalek." The scoffing cynic has the ability to burst the bubble of enthusiasm with a shrug and a "so what?" or "big deal!" Amalek rained on our parade.

Sensitive students of the psychology of religion know the effects of cynicism and sarcasm upon spirituality and soulful moods. One such student was the famed 18th century pietist, Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzato, more commonly known as the Ramchal. This is what he writes in

his masterpiece, Mesilat Yesharim (The Path of the Just), towards the end of the fifth chapter:

"Scoffing has a sinister and depraving effect. As a shield that is anointed with oil causes the arrows that strike it to glance off without touching the body, so scoffing renders reproof and chastisement ineffective. A single sarcasm or jest is liable to blight most of the spiritual zeal and enthusiasm which a man may have acquired from the experience that taught him to be particular and scrupulous in his actions. As a result of ridicule he is apt to cast off all that he has learned so that there is no sign of it left in him, not because it is not instructive, nor because he lacks understanding, but because mockery has the power to destroy every vestige of conscience and reverence."

When we observe Parshat Zachor and read the story of Amalek in the synagogue this Shabbat, we are commanded to forever remember what he did to our people. Of course, we will try to remember the primary lesson, namely to never forget the genocidal intentions of our enemies beginning with Amalek and continuing to this very day.

But it would also be instructive to remember Amalek as the cynical scoffer who would diminish our fervor and spirit. In remembering him in this manner, we would also do well to resolve that we ourselves are never guilty of mocking the accomplishments of others. We must be careful not to rain on the parade of other human beings, but rather to appreciate their accomplishments with neither envy nor disparagement.

We must find room on the doors of our refrigerators to proudly

exhibit the childlike paintings of those who show them to us with enthusiasm.

Continuing I noted the Antidote to Amalek. How does one keep the enthusiasm alive? How does one fight the scoffer? How does one encourage and build to combat those who wish to break. The answer is love and unity. When we love someone completely, we support, we encourage and we build. When we are united, we stand together and sustain each other.

The Maor Veshemesh quotes the verse erase the memory of Amalek. He suggest we might read this as erase or subtract memory from Amalek. The value of Zecher or memory is 227. If we subtract that from Amalek which we mentioned is equal to 240 in gematria, we are left with 13.

As Rabbi Abittan often taught us, 13 is the numerical value of Ahavah which is love and the word Echad which is one and which in Shema represents unity. When we are like "one" and have love for each other, then we can destroy Amalek. This is the antidote for the one who wants to pop the balloon or freeze the motivated one in his place.

There are forces in our children's life that constantly try to push them down, to break their spirit, to kill their enthusiasm. We need to surround our children with people and friends who promote them rather than break them. We need to turn our homes and families in bastions of love and unity. With these tools we can build those around us.

Writing now I recall the Rabbi explaining when there is love represented by the number 13 between two, we have 26 which represents the name of Hashem in the letters Yud and Keh and

Vav and Keh. This name represents the aspect of mercy and loving kindness.

Amalek is the force in our life which cool us down. Amalek is the force that looks to pop the balloon. Amalek is the force that tries to attack us with the disease of doubt. We battle it through unity and love. And only when we have unity 13 and love 13, can we truly experience Hashem 26.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: This first Aliya concludes the details of the Mishkan's construction. The Bnai Yisroel are commanded to give the half Shekel toward a national census and the purchasing of the public offerings. The copper washstand, the Kiyor, is described along with the ingredients and laws of the anointing oil and the Ketores - the incense. Betzallel, the grandson of Chur and great-grandson of Miriam, is identified as the chief artisan and architect of the Mishkan. (Note: he was only 13 yr. old!) The Mitzvah of Shabbos is commanded. Its juxtaposition to the details of the Mishkan provides the Gemara with the source for determining the 39 categories of Melacha prohibited on Shabbos.

2nd Aliya: The story of the Golden Calf is told. Moshe ascended Sinai on the morning of Sivan 7, and remained 40 days and nights. The 7th didn't start with a night, so it wasn't included in the total of 40. The Jews mistakenly assumed that it was to be included and expected Moshe back on the morning of Tamuz 16. Instead, he returned the morning of Tamuz 17. By midday

of the 16th, the Jews were already desperate. Chur attempts to reason with them and is killed. They approach Aharon who attempts to redirect their terror which results in the Golden Calf. Moshe appears the next morning, breaks the Luchos, marshals the tribe of Levi, and 3000 people are killed. Moshe demands Hashem's forgiveness for the people, but moves the Ohel Moed out from the midst of the camp. Yehoshua is proclaimed the main student of Moshe.

3rd & 4th Aliyot: Moshe requests to understand Hashem's system of justice. He is granted a greater understanding of Hashem than any other person in history, but is denied the ability to comprehend divine justice.

5th Aliya: Moshe is instructed to cut two new Luchos and ascend Sinai. Moshe is taught the secret formula for Teshuva (the Thirteen Names of G-d as He Manifests His Mercy) (34:6) and G-d forgives the Bnai Yisroel.

6th Aliya: Hashem establishes a new covenant with the people. He forewarns them against the influences of assimilation and intermarriage and forbids them to make any treaties with the inhabitants of Canaan. The holidays of Pesach, Shevout, and Succos are reviewed, as well as Shabbos and the basic law of Kashrus.

7th Aliya: Moshe remains on Sinai another 40 days and nights and returns on Yom Kippur carrying the second Luchos. The people see that the very being of Moshe had been transformed and that his face radiated with a inner light. Moshe fashions for himself a veil that he would wear at all times, except when receiving a prophecy and when transmitting the word of G-d to the people.

This week's Haftorah relates the famous story of Eliyahu on Mt. Carmel. Around the year 3021 - 740 b.c.e. King Achav and his wife Ezevel ruled the 10 Tribes with an iron fist advancing the worship of idols throughout the kingdom. Eliyahu, the fearless servant of G-d, challenged Achav's hold on the people by demanding a showdown on Mt. Carmel between himself and the false prophets of the Baal. The scene is one of the more spectacular events recorded in the Navi. Eliyahu, displayed absolute trust in Hashem and challenged the false prophets of the Baal to a public refutation. In the end, just as Moshe's return proved the falsehood of the Golden Calf, so too, Eliyahu proved the falsehood of the belief in the Baal.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Moshe pleaded before Hashem." (Shemot 32:11)

Our parashah describes Moshe Rabenu's successful prayer. Moshe Rabenu gives it his all, to save the Jewish people from complete annihilation, due to the terrible sin of the Golden Calf. From this chapter we can learn some huge lessons on the power of our prayers and what to do if has veshalom one is placed in a very dangerous and difficult situation.

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus zt"l says we can capture a few gems from this story. First of all the Gemara (Berachot 32b) tells that when Moshe saw the great anger of Hashem, he felt physically drained and unable to speak. However, as soon as Hashem told him, "Leave Me so I can destroy them," (Debarim

9:14) Moshe realized that it was up to him to try to prevent it from happening. Immediately he mustered all of his strength and begged for mercy. We can now learn that if a terrible situation arises and one feels unable to pray due to the anxiety of the situation, that is the most important time to pray and most likely to get a positive response.

Eventually it says, "And Hashem reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people." OK, Hashem forgave. Moshe continues to push forward. Moshe wasn't satisfied until Hashem agreed to restore the same level of love and blessings that existed before the sin. Moshe was still not satisfied. He asks for a greater revelation of Hashem's mercy and he gained now what we know today as the thirteen attributes of mercy! Today we recite it all the time to activate Hashem's mercy! The Sages are surprised. Is it possible that Moshe acquires more benefits after the sin than they had before the sin?

The answer is yes. Once Moshe had to pray so hard because of the terrible situation, he successfully opened the gates of mercy. Once that happened it was a good time to pray for even more than he had before.

If someone is fatally ill and the loved one prays and the person gets out of danger, then pray for complete good health. If someone is in deep debt and prays and finds a way to pay it off – don't stop praying there. Pray for complete financial well-being; the gates are open.

If someone prays hard without letting up, the pasuk that says "May He grant you as your heart [desires] and may He fulfill your every plan" {Tehillim 20:5} will be fulfilled with him.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

When Moshe asked Hashem to let him understand the ways of Hashem, Hashem told him He would show him the back (so to speak) and not the front of Hashem. The Rabbis tell us this is a metaphor. We have to realize that when we are in a situation, as it is unfolding, we cannot fathom the ways of Hashem frontward. However, after the fact we are sometimes able to "see" from the back view what has already transpired. This will give us the necessary clarity of vision to realize what Hashem has done and to appreciate His wondrous ways. This should serve as a basis for us to have faith in Him. For if we see in retrospect how He judges and runs the world, this will strengthen our trust in Him, which will help us overcome difficult situations. May we be privileged to appreciate Hashem "from the back" as we look back at different events in our lives! Shabbat Shalom.

\RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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The Half That We Don't See Parashat Ki-Tisa begins with the Misva of "Mahasit Ha'shekel" – the mandatory half-shekel tax that was imposed upon all members of Beneh Yisrael. The first time this tax was collected, the silver coins were used to make the "Adanim," the sockets that formed the foundation of the Mishkan. All the other parts of the Mishkan were made from materials that the people donated voluntarily. The sockets, however, were supplied through a mandatory half-shekel flat tax imposed upon each and every member of the nation.

One Rabbi commented that the sockets which formed the foundation of the Mishkan represent the foundation of the Jewish religion. Of course, each and every Halachic detail is crucial and indispensable. But the foundation, the basis of it all, is faith in God. Without faith, sincere commitment to the Torah's precepts is impossible. And this is why the sockets were supplied through a mandatory tax. When it comes to other Misvot, we find some commands that are directed toward certain members of the nation, and some that are binding upon all but with room for some to excel at a higher level than others. Some members will choose to focus more on some areas of Torah than other areas, and levels of commitment will, naturally, not be the same for everyone, as much as we should all be aspiring to excel. But when it comes to the foundation, we are all on the same page. We all share equally the same obligation to firmly believe in God's existence and providence.

If, indeed, the "Mahasit Ha'shekel" donation represents faith, we can perhaps understand why it required donating a half-coin, rather than a complete coin. A prerequisite of faith is acknowledging that we see only half the picture. We do not have access to the whole picture; we can never truly understand why God runs the world as He does, why misfortune befalls the righteous while the wicked prosper. Oftentimes God's decisions seem to us unfair, but this is because we see only half the picture, whereas He – and only He – sees the complete picture and has complete knowledge of what's best for us and the world.

Later in the Parasha, we read that Moshe Rabbenu asked God to show him how he runs the world,

the answer to the age-old question of why the righteous often suffer while the wicked prosper – “Har’eni Na Et Kebodecha” (“Show me, if You please, Your glory” – 33:18). God answered Moshe that no man can access this knowledge. Even Moshe Rabbenu, whose level of prophecy far surpassed that of any other prophet, who spoke to God “face to face,” in whatever sense that can happen, was not given the answer to this question. Indeed, even Moshe saw only part of the picture.

This should be a great source of comfort for us when we encounter times of hardship and distress. All of us – even Moshe Rabbenu – are in the same “half-shekel” group. We are not supposed to have the answers to all the questions, and we will never understand why God does what He does. The foundation of the Mishkan, of the Torah, is the acceptance of the inherent limitations of our understanding, and believing that the full picture is known only to the Almighty.

Rabbi Wein

The Torah commands that a count of the Jewish people should be undertaken. Such a count was in fact taken a number of times during the sojourn of the people of Israel in the Sinai desert. What is noteworthy is the language – the words the Torah uses in ordering this count to take place.

The literal translation of those words is “When you raise the heads of the Jewish people to assess their numbers...” The Torah does not state simply “when you count the people of Israel.” Instead it teaches us a very important lesson in Jewish and family life. A person who is counted and considers himself or herself to be part of the Jewish people has to do so by being a

person with a raised head. That person has to feel that he or she is special, chosen, set aside for a particular mission in life. The raised head is the symbol of Jewish pride and determination.

The count of the Jewish people is not meant to be merely numerical. It is far more profound and meaningful. It is really a count-me-in type of equation. Thus the task of the leader of the people is not only to come up with an accurate population number but, perhaps even more importantly, to inspire and raise those being counted to a greater understanding of their role and purpose in being part of the Jewish people. For eventually, being counted as a member of the Jewish people requires commitment, effort and constant personal development.

We are all aware of the injunction not to count Jews directly, as in this week’s parsha, where they were counted by the number of half shekels collected by the census takers. We read in the book of Shmuel that King Saul counted the Jewish people by assessing the number of individual sheep. The same lesson is involved in this rule as the idea mentioned in the previous paragraph – that the true count of the people of Israel is never only in the raw number of people present. It is in the worth of the individual, the pride and self-esteem of being Jewish - and that is not something that can easily be assessed by a number.

Coins and sheep are susceptible to being counted numerically – not the Jewish people or for that matter any human being. The influence of a life is something not given to physical measurement or numerical count. The Torah commands us to raise our heads, to become more knowledgeable, devoted and committed to its holy

values, observances and spiritual outlook. Each individual Jew must feel and believe that he or she is special, unique, vital and necessary for the whole nation to exist and prosper.

People who feel “there is no difference if I am Jewish, observant, or part of a people” do themselves and the Jewish people as a whole a great disservice. Only those who proudly raise their heads are truly part of the eternal count of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky - Parsha Parables

Under the Gun

Indeed it was more powerful than the dire predictions and admonitions of the 48 prophets that the Jews had heard throughout their history. The Talmud in Tractate Megillah teaches us, (Tractate Megillah 14a) "Greater was the removal of the ring (that King Achashverosh gave to Haman (Esther 3:10) than the rebuke of the 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses to Israel."

That is quite a powerful statement. How was it possible that the mere handing of a ring can influence the Jewish People more than the formal schooling and guidance of the greatest teachers in history?

The Story

I recently was gifted a most wonderful book, I Believe- The Story of One Jewish Life, by Mr. Leibel (Leo) Zisman. The book, which I shall even call a sefer, is a brutally honest biography of Leibel Zisman, born and raised in Kovno, (Kaunas) Lithuania. The book is especially dear to me, as Kovno is the city where both my wife's mother and grandparents, and my father and grandfather lived.

Hailing from a distinguished lineage of Lubavitcher Chasidim, young Leibel, snatched from his parents around the age of his Bar Mitzvah, tells the story of his faith and survival. The book is peppered with heartwarming, as well as heart-wrenching anecdotes, but the despair to hope to joy; from rags to riches narrative, is truly befitting for a Post Purim or a Pre Pesach read.

In the latter part of the book, R' Leibel, tells how he together with his older brother Berel, who survived the war as well, ventured into the field of construction, a profession that, with the help of the Almighty, and the blessings and guidance of their Rebbe, proved to be very lucrative.

Early in their career, they were once grilled by an antagonistic attorney who was trying to absolve his client from the responsibility of paying for a job that was duly and wholly performed by the Zisman brothers and their firm, Elzee Construction. The lawyer tried all sorts of methods to discredit the Zisman brothers, but the evidence was stacked against the man.

Mr. Zisman was put on the stand in before the judge and the lawyer asked him, "Have you had any formal education in construction? The lawyer thought that Berel would hang his head in embarrassment but instead he answered, I don't know what you mean by formal, but I will definitely say that I have a semi formal education in construction. When the lawyer prodded him, "Exactly what did semi formal mean?" Berel clarified his answer. "I trained in construction under the tutelage of German engineers of the Mohl Company at the Landsberg concentration camp with an SS officer pointing a gun at me." He paused. "Would

you call that formal or semi formal?"

The courtroom burst out laughing the lawyer had no more questions and they won the case. (Afterwards the plaintiff told Leibel, "Don't take it personally, I sue everybody! And if I win 50 percent of the time, then I am ahead of the game!")

The Message

Perhaps the Gemarah is reminding us of a lesson that is as poignant today as it was thousands of years ago when a madman in Persia seized power and declared his intention to annihilate the Jews.

Sometimes the transfer of power to a madman, sometimes working under the gun, can do much more to teach us what we have to learn than the greatest formal educators of our history.

I hope we can learn the lesson before it is too late.

Ricky Cohen

It's déjà vu all over again. I put my clown costume away and I'm starting to think matzah! We move from one calendar milestone to the next. Thirty days before it begins we immerse in all that the upcoming holiday commemorates. So I'm thinking matzah.

Where to begin?

There is an ancient custom practiced during the commemoration of the Jewish people's step into nationhood; the custom is to gather around the Passover seder and ask questions.

The purpose of the questions is to stroke curiosity and to inspire awareness. It is to draw interest and tempt further questions. Its ultimate purpose is for there to be

new insights, greater sensitivities and heightened understanding. Therefore even if you are commemorating the holiday alone you must still ask the questions. Questions, even those unanswerable, yield self-knowledge and awareness.

Solutions and answers are insightful yet questions are liberating and life building.

"...Why? Why should this be? How do all of the components connect? How does this make me feel? What was the thinker's intent? How can I reconcile these conflicting proofs? What are the historical perspectives that may have shaped this opinion? What are the meta messages...?"

Ask, ask, and then ask some more – even if you are certain there is no answer. Encourage those in your life to ask as well. Listen carefully to their questions. Listen to the words used and to their meta-messages – the intent behind their words.

Don't rush to answer. Think, pause and consider; dwell on the question. Let the asker know that you value the question. If there is a suitable answer, provide one. If not, leave it open.

To question is to exercise freedom, and to plant the seeds for future growth and forward movement. For those questions to which there is no answer – but there is a feeling of sadness or confusion, or a feeling of joyfulness and warmth – the feeling is a hint to the answer.

As you review your day before closing your eyes at night, do the "Ask and Don't Tell" exercise. Recount how many questions you asked that day. Keep a running weekly total. (Once you get this going, begin to think about how many questions you heard your

child ask). Consider, how many of your questions were the expressions of your mind working more rigorously, and more astutely than in the past.

Get a sense of how many of those questions have been left without answers. The number of questions asked should increase each week. The questions left unanswered will provide you the greatest growth.

The extent of a human being's freedom is directly related to the extent and depth of his/her questions. Begin the process to reclaim freedom. Think matzah and ask questions!

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Witnessing the birth of a new idea is a little like watching the birth of a galaxy through the Hubble Space Telescope. We can witness just such an event in a famous rabbinical commentary to a key verse in this week's parsha.

The way to see it is to ask the question: what is the Hebrew word for freedom? Instinctively, we answer cherut. After all, we say that God brought us me-avdut le-cherut, "from slavery to freedom." We call Pesach, the Festival of freedom, zeman cherutenu. So it comes as a surprise to discover that not once does the Torah, or Tanakh as a whole, use the word cherut in the sense of freedom, and only once does it use the word, or at least the related word charut, in any sense whatever.

There are two biblical words for freedom. One is chofshi/chofesh, used in connection with the freeing of slaves (as in Ex. 21: 2). That too is the word used in

Israel's national anthem, Hatikva, which speaks about "the two-thousand-year hope to be a free people [am chofshi] in our land."

The other is dror, used in connection with the Jubilee year, engraved on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia: "Proclaim liberty [dror] throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Lev. 25: 10). The same word appears in Isaiah's great words: "to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom [dror] for the captives" (Is. 61: 1).

However, the sages coined a new word. Here is the passage in which it occurs:

It says, "The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved [charut] on the tablets" (Ex. 32:16). Read not charut, "engraved" but cherut, "freedom," for the only person who is truly free is one who occupies himself with Torah study. (Avot 6: 2).

The reference is to the first tablets given by God to Moses just before the sin of the golden calf. This is the only appearance in Tanakh of root ch-r-t (with a tav), but a related word, ch-r-t (with a tet) appears in the story of the golden calf itself, when the Torah tells us that Aaron shaped it with a cheret, an "engraving tool." The Egyptian magicians are called chartumim, which may mean "engravers of hieroglyphics." So how did a word that means "engraved" come to mean "freedom"?

Besides which, why was a new term for freedom needed? If the Hebrew language already had two, why was a third necessary? And why this word – engraved? To answer these questions, let us engage in some conceptual archaeology.

Chofesh/chofshi is what a slave becomes when he or she goes free. It means that he can do what he likes. There is no one to order him around. The word is related to chafetz, "desire" and chapess, "seek". Chofesh is the freedom to pursue your desires. It is what philosophers call negative liberty. It means the absence of coercion.

Chofesh is fine for individual freedom. But it does not constitute collective freedom. A society in which everyone was free to do what they liked would not be a free society. It would be, at best, like the society we saw on the streets of London and Manchester in the summer of 2011, with people breaking shop windows, looting and assaulting strangers.

More likely it would be what failed states are today: a society without the rule of law, with no effective government, honest police, or independent courts. It would be what Hobbes called "the war of every man against every man" in which life would be "nasty, brutish and short." Something like this is referred to in the last verse of the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes."

A free society needs law. But law is a constraint on freedom. It forbids me to do something I might wish to do. How then are we to reconcile law and liberty? That is a question at the heart of Judaism – which is a religion of both law and liberty.

To answer this, the sages made an extraordinary leap of the imagination. Consider two forms of writing in ancient times. One is to use ink on parchment, another is to engrave words in stone. There is a marked difference between these two methods.

The ink and parchment are two different materials. The ink is external to the parchment. It is superimposed upon it, and it does not become part of the parchment. It remains distinct, and so it can be rubbed off and removed. But an engraving does not use some new substance. It is carved out of the stone itself. It becomes part of it, and cannot easily be obliterated.

Now consider these two ways of writing as metaphors for law. There is a law that is externally imposed. People keep it because they fear that if they do not, they will be caught and punished. But if there is no chance that they will be caught, they make break it, for the law has not changed their desires. That kind of law – imposed on us like ink on parchment – is a limitation of freedom.

But there can be a different kind of society in which people keep the law not because they fear they will be caught and punished, but because they know the law, they have studied it, they understand it, they have internalised it, and it has become part of who they are. They no longer desire to do what the law forbids because they now know it is wrong and they wrestle with their own temptations and desires. Such a law needs no police because it is based not on external force but on internal transformation through the process of education. The law is like writing engraved in stone.

Imagine such a society. You can walk in the streets without fear. You don't need high walls and alarms to keep your home safe. You can leave your car unlocked and still expect to find it there when you return. People keep the law because they care about the

common good. That is a free society.

Now imagine the other kind of society, which needs a heavy police presence, constant surveillance, neighbourhood watch schemes, security devices and personnel, and still people are afraid to walk alone at night. People think they are free because they have been taught that all morality is relative, and you can do what you like so long as you do not harm others. No one who has seen such a society can seriously believe it is free. Individuals may be free, but society as a whole has to be on constant guard because it is at constant risk. It is a society with little trust and much fear.

Hence the brilliant new concept that emerged in rabbinic Judaism: cherut, the freedom that comes to a society – of which Jews were called on to be pioneers – where people not only know the law but study it constantly until it is engraved on their hearts as the commandments were once engraved on stone. That is what the sages meant when they said, “Read not charut, engraved, but cherut, freedom, for the only person who is truly free is one who occupies himself with Torah study.” In such a society you keep the law because you want to, because having studied the law you understand why it is there. In such a society there is no conflict between law and freedom.

Where did the sages get this idea from? I believe it came from their deep understanding of what Jeremiah meant when he spoke of the renewed covenant that would come into being once Jews returned after the Babylonian exile. The renewed covenant “will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt ... This is the

covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time – declares the Lord – I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts ...” (Jer. 31: 31-33).

Many centuries later Josephus recorded that this had actually happened. “Should anyone of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.”

To this day many still do not fully understand this revolutionary idea. People still think that a free society can be brought about simply by democratic elections and political structures. But democracy, as Alexis de Tocqueville said long ago, may simply turn out to be “the tyranny of the majority.”

Freedom is born in the school and the House of Study. That is the freedom still pioneered by the people who, more than any other, have devoted their time to studying, understanding and internalising the law. What is the Jewish people? A nation of constitutional lawyers. Why? Because only when the law is engraved on our souls can we achieve collective freedom without sacrificing individual freedom. That is cherut – Judaism's great contribution to the idea and practice of liberty.