

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TESAVEH/ZACHOR/PURIM  
Haftarah: Shemuel I 15:1-34

MARCH 9-10, 2017 13 ADAR 5777  
DEDICATION: In memory of Lillian Grossman

**Shabbat Zachor - This Shabbat, we will read an extra portion of Torah which commands us to remember what Amalek did to us and our obligation to wipe him out. All men are required to hear this special reading and even women should try to fulfill this obligation.**

**Purim will be celebrated on Saturday night and Sunday, March 10-11.  
Remember to bring your megillah to the Synagogue before Shabbat**

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to  
[ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)  
Newsletter archives now at [BenaiAsher.Org](http://BenaiAsher.Org)

Shabbat Shalom From Cyberspace E Mail Edition is published each week since 1995 and is distributed to 20,000 readers. Our goal is to spread torah knowledge. Articles are downloaded from sites and from e-mail forwarded to us. We encourage you to reprint the newsletter and distribute it to co-workers, friends and family. You can retransmit copies by fax, mail or by hand. Be a part of the Mitzvah of spreading torah. It takes so little to make copies and distribute them. And with E Mail it just takes a click to send this along. To subscribe directly or have us send to a friend or family member, click the link or send a request to [SephardicCongregation@Gmail.com](mailto:SephardicCongregation@Gmail.com) with your name, phone, fax and E-Mail Address

Daily Minyan MINCHA - Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame – 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day – Followed by Arbit - Give us 18 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

## Editors Notes

### What Could Have Become of Me? Tesaveh 5777

Each Shabbat we have a kiddush at our synagogue. During the winter when we pray Mincha around 12:30, we extend lunch with a class and often add some additional short speeches by congregants relating to that week's kiddush dedication.

This past Shabbat we commemorated the Yahrzeit's of Mr. Alan Wagner the father of my long time Chevrotah, Rabbi Michael Wagner and Mr. Simcha Yusupov whose family had emigrated from the former Soviet Union, who I count among my dearest friends and who have become strong pillars of our community.

Four people spoke this Shabbat, the last being my friend Alex Yusupov who mentioned that although it's been 35 years since his father passed away, no matter the length of time, he can still smell his Dad's aftershave.

Vladimir Nabokov wrote: "Nothing revives the past so completely as a smell that was once associated with it."

As the hour was late when it was my turn to speak, I decided to set aside the class and after hearing Alex recalled a lesson from Rabbi Abittan, z'sl. Although the rabbi has been gone for more than 11 years, he is with us in this congregation every day through his lessons and his teachings.

I was confused that the portion of Terumah which details the vessels, the ark, the show table, the menorah and the entire mishkan fails to mention the golden alter. In fact this alter which sat adjacent to the menorah and the show table and upon which Aaron burned the ketoret or incense offering every day is not mentioned until the final segment of this week's portion of Tesaveh following all the details of the priestly clothing.

"What happened", I asked.

The rabbi explained, acharon, acharon, chabib .... The last is dearest! We are to understand that nothing is as important or as powerful as the incense offering. The Meam Loez explains that the word Ketoret is an acrostic of Kedusha- holiness, Tahorah – purity, Rachamim – mercy and Tikvah – hope and explains the function of the incense. It would add holiness to the Israelites, cure them of their sins, then Hashem would have mercy on them and the people would have hope.

Rabbi Ari Kahn writes that one of the major elements of the Yom Kippur atonement process was the incense with which the Kohen Gadol entered the Kodosh Kodashim: The incense was both a symbol and a vehicle of the transformation of the sins of the Jewish People on Yom Kippur.

What was so special about the reyach nichoach – what is so special about the sense of smell?

The Bnei Yissachar teaches with regard to the corruption of the senses by the sin in the Garden of Eden that when man sinned, all the senses were involved. She and he in turn hear the arguments of the snake, they see the fruit which is appealing, they touch the fruit and they taste the fruit. All of the senses participated with the exception of smell. Therefore, from the uncorrupted sense of smell, healing can take place. He suggests that this is why incense was a central element of the service of Yom Kippur.

The rabbis tell us that through the sprinkling of blood on the inner alter and the ketoret on Yom Kippur, the prosecutor can actually be turned from an accuser to an advocate. Rabbi Abittan would explain that our job is not to eradicate evil, but to actually turn evil into good.

We know that the incense contained eleven ingredients including the putrid smelling khelbona. The Rabbi would explain that through the ketoret, even this eleventh rotten ingredient, transforms and plays a role in the sweetness of the other ten. He would say that even a Rasha – wicked person - joining ten others in a minyan can be transformed and add to the sum.

The Talmud in Chullin asks, where is Mordechai to be found in the Torah? And replies with the words mor dror which refer to a particular fragrance that accompanies certain korbanot — and in Aramaic the words mor dror are rendered mira dichya which sort of sounds like “Mordechai.”

I believe the lesson is that Mordechai was able to take evil and use it for good. This is his power. He was able to use a plot hatched by others to kill the king - to catapult his own standing. He was able to use a plot woven by Haman to kill the Jews - to set in motion the recommitment of the Jewish people to Hashem and as a catalyst to rebuild the Temple.

Perhaps this is the theme of Purim which relates to Yom HaKIPURIM, the transformation of evil into good. Who can miss this in the fact that the Talmud in Gittin reminds us that the descendants of Haman learned Torah in Bnei Brak. Rabbi Kahn writes that Haman's fate is turned "upside down", not once but twice: He is hung on the tree he himself prepared for Mordechai's execution, and his descendants become a part of the nation he wished to destroy.

I saw this myself many years ago when my wife brought a talmid chaham from Benai Brak as my guide for a tour of Yad VaShem. The guide was a ger, a convert, who had become an expert of the

holocaust when he discovered that his own father was a Nazi and this eventually led to his conversion. Today he is a scholar raising scholars in the study of Torah. Truly he is transforming evil into good.

Rabbi Abittan often marveled at the miracle of observant Jews and scholars coming from the Soviet Union. Lenin and Stalin and their cohorts tried for seventy years to eradicate Judaism and any vestige of it from the lives of Jewish Russians, yet against all odds they safeguarded their “pintele yid”, their Jewish flame until they were given the opportunity again to let it burn brightly.

I closed with an amazing story I heard from Rabbi Duvi BenSoussan, a Moroccan rabbi in the community whose father like Rabbi Abittan was one of the boys brought by Rabbi Kalmanowitz, Isaac Shalom and my great Uncle Dave Bibi to the Mirrer Yeshiva in America through Otzar HaTorah

The Rabbi related the tale of a Chabad Rabbi he knew in Short Hills, New Jersey. Some years back the rabbi was able to mekarev or bring back to Judaism a young man, a few years later he was able to do the same for a young girl from the same area.

The rabbi explained that these two became part of his ever-expanding and extended family. He was over whelmed with joy when the two decided to marry and assisted in arranging their wedding. He wanted it to be the most joyous wedding in Short Hills. There were about 100 guests from the two small families; most of them with little connection to religion. The rabbi hoped that when the bride and groom would come into the hall, everyone in the room would dance with them. He went from table to table encouraging all the people and getting their commitments. When the dancing began he felt joy that everyone in the room was dancing, but then he said he saw one elderly man sitting at a table alone. He walked over to the man, put out his hands and asked the man to join him for a dance. The man said he would love to but he was just into much pain and it was impossible for him to get up.

The rabbi asked him if he could help and the man explained that earlier that day he underwent a circumcision. The rabbi looked at him and asked if seeing the rabbi's beard, the man was making fun of him. But the man said it all seriousness, “no, I did it this morning. There was the mohel, there was a sandak who stood behind me and it was all done kosher”.

The rabbi asked, "But how old are you?"

The man said that he was 92 years old.

And the rabbi asked, "Why now?"

The man explained that the groom was his grandson and a couple of months earlier his grandson and come to him with the news that he would be getting married, that he was so proud that he was getting married to a religious girl and he had become religious himself. At the same time he apologized to his grandfather and said to him that although he would love him to be at the wedding there was one place in the wedding that his grandfather couldn't join them and that was under the chupah, because under the canopy was the presence of Hashem and as his grandfather wasn't circumcised he didn't want his grandfather standing there.

The grandfather said, "I love my grandson more than anything in the world and so I decided in his honor I would do this. And so today I had my own Brit Milah. And I was overjoyed this evening as they carried me and helped me under the chupa where I sat and shared in the ceremony of the marriage of my grandson".

"But Rabbi, the old man continued, "I am in terrible pain and I can hardly move".

The Rabbi had never felt so moved in his life and reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out an envelope.

On the envelope was written, Lubavitcher Rebbe 1991

The rabbi explained that this was the last dollar he had received from the Rebbe and with this dollar the Rebbe blessed him with health and since that day the Rabbi had never been sick. He wanted to give the dollar as a gift to the grandfather in hopes that it would help with his complete recovery.

The old man looked at the envelope held it in his two hands and started to cry. The rabbi fearing had done something wrong asked the old man if he was OK.

The grandfather told the Rabbi to sit down. Now Rabbi let me tell you a story. I came to this country 51 years ago. Because of Soviet law, I knew next to nothing about Judaism. A friend of mine told me on my second day in America that to begin life anew I should get a blessing from the Rebbe. He took me to Eastern Parkway on a cold Sunday morning where we stood in line for hours and reminded me of the lines in Russia. When I finally got to meet the Rebbe, I looked at his piercing blue eyes, his long white beard and he looked at me handing me the dollar and

then suddenly pulling it back. I wondered what happened. And then he asked me in Russian, Did I have a Brit Milah"? Embarrassed I looked at him and said no.

He handed me the dollar and blessed me that I should have my Brit telling me on the day I would be circumcised he would give me another dollar. And as he completed the story, the old man cried even more. The Rabbi asked, "but this is really miraculous, why are you so sad still?" And the man looked up, tears still pouring down his cheeks and said, "Holding this dollar, I realize now that had I been circumcised when the Rebbe first told me to 50 years ago how different my life would be. I am so happy to see what has become of my grandson, but sitting here now for the first time in my life I wonder what could have become of me?"

Looking at my friends I noted that their success was that they were always quick to run after a misvah and never delaying it and blessed them that they and all of us should be zocheh to convert evil into good.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

### **Summary of the Perasha - Tesaveh - A description of the clothing of the Kohan**

- 1- Hashem tells Moshe to make priestly clothing for Aharon. A description of the efod (the apron).
- 2- A description of the hoshen mishpat (the breastplate).
- 3- A description of the me'iyil (the robe) and the tsits (headplate).
- 4- Hashem describes to Moshe the process of inaugurating Aharon and his sons as kohanim (7 days of korbanot, anointing oil and wearing the special clothes)
- 5- Hashem describes to Moshe the process of inaugurating Aharon and his sons as kohanim
- 6- A description of the olat tamid (the daily olah offering)
- 7- A description of the golden mizbeyach (which the incense was brought on)

**What should we be thinking about when reading the story of the Megillah.** Maybe we could be thinking about how much Hashem loves us and how he is guiding every step of our lives whether we realize it or not. As we read the Megillah we can try and take notice of every seemingly simple and coincidental event throughout the story and see that it was Hashem's loving hand. Why was the capital in Shushan where Mordechai lived? Why were Bigtan and Teresh talking about killing the king in public?

Why did Mordechai happen to be there? Why did Achashverosh not reward Mordechai on the spot for saving his life? Why did Achashverosh kill Vashti? Why was Esther chosen as the queen? All these are seemingly unrelated events but when looked at together clearly represent the loving hand of Hashem. The hand of Hashem setting up our salvation from even before the problem begins. And this is the feeling that reading the Megillah is meant to inspire. That Hashem is in our life. He is behind the scenes worrying about us, caring about us, and orchestrating our salvation. And this is our challenge, to see Hashem's hand in our life on a daily basis. How did we get to where we are today! How did we get to this point in our lives and through the challenges we faced along the way. Purim is a time to step back and see the big picture. To see with clarity that Hashem is guiding our life. He loves us and is taking care of us! This is the simcha of Purim!!! It is a special time to strengthen our emuna and love Hashem. May we all merit true happiness this Purim and a growth in emunah that will last us throughout the year!

Some interesting points regarding the timeline of when the events of the Megillah took place;

- Megilat Esther takes place over the course of 11 years
- From the time the Jews went to the party until the time they were punished with the decree to destroy the Jews was 9 years (the party was in the 4th Year of Achashverosh's reign as king and the decree was in the 13th year).
- From the time Mordechai saves the life of Achashverosh until he is rewarded is 5 years.
- From the time Mordechai doesn't bow to Haman until Haman draws lots to destroy the Jews is 5 years.
- The decree for the Jews to be destroyed wasn't for right away but rather for 11 months later.
- Even though the decree was almost 1 year away Mordechai and the Jewish people fast right away (even though it was Pesach they did not wait even a few days and fasted on Pesach).
- While the story of the megilah takes place over the course of 11 yrs the crux of the story takes place over just 3 days (It was only 3 days from the time of the decree to kill the Jews until Hashem switched things around and Haman was hung).
- Haman was hung right away while his 10 sons were not hung until 11 months later.
- Although Haman was killed the decree to kill the Jews 11 months later was not annulled. People still set out to kill the Jewish people however the Jews were given the right to defend themselves and were victorious.

## FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine." (Megillat Esther 1:10)

In the story of Purim, Achashverosh throws a lavish party for the people of Shushan. On the seventh day, the king is very drunk. Our Sages tell us that the seventh day of the party was Shabbat. Literally, every occurrence of the word "hamelech" (the king) is a reference to Achashverosh. The Sages, however, say that it alludes to Hashem, the King of kings. On Shabbat, Hashem sees the contrast between the gentiles and the Jewish people. When the Jews drink wine on Shabbat, they sing the praises of Hashem, but when the gentiles drink, it leads to lewdness and violence. The Jewish people have always shown that the Shabbat day is very blessed to them.

In a story told by Rabbi Yitzhak Hisiger, we see this very idea in Rabbi Yehudah Sadka zt"l, Rosh Yeshivah of Porat Yosef. Rav Yehudah was once travelling in a taxi on Erev Shabbat. During the ride, he heard a message crackling on the driver's radio. It was the taxi driver's boss offering him a job that evening. The driver initially refused, explaining that it would be after hours and he was scheduled to be off duty by that time. However, when he was informed that the job would pay him a whopping 600 shekels, he changed his mind and gratefully accepted the job.

Rav Sadka, overhearing the exchange, was greatly perturbed. How could he allow this man to be mehalel Shabbat that evening? He immediately reached into his pocket, withdrew 600 shekels, and handed it to the man.

"Here," said the Rosh Yeshivah. "Take this money and tell your boss that you'll pass on the job tonight."

The driver was shocked. He couldn't believe that the elderly Sage would gift him, a complete stranger, all that money just so that he wouldn't desecrate the Shabbat.

The driver informed his boss that he'd had a change of heart and would not be able to take the job that evening. Turning to Rav Sadka, he handed the Rosh Yeshivah the money he had just been given. His eyes filled with tears as he grabbed hold of Rav Sadka's hand, and began to kiss it.

"Kevod Harav, take back the money," he said. "I won't do the job tonight! I see how much Kedushat Shabbat means to the Rav, and I am taking it upon myself to keep Shabbat from here on, however difficult it may be."

The driver immediately formed a close relationship with Rav Sadka and became a full-fledged ba'al teshubah.

All because of how much Rav Sadka cared about another Jew's Shabbat, to the extent that he

was willing to put his money where his faith was.  
Rabbi Reuven Semah

When Haman's great-grandfather, Amalek, attacked the Jewish people in the wilderness, the name of the place where he was able to fight them was Refidim. This was a station where the Jews were in a weakened state of Torah study, and because of this, Amalek was able to start up with us. Indeed, whenever a tyrant or despot threatens the Jewish nation, it is invariably because of our lack of Torah study. Thus we find that right after the Purim miracle, when Haman and his people were defeated, there was a tremendous resurgence of Torah study amongst the Jews, and this eventually culminated in the compilation of the Oral Law.

The week before Purim, we read Parashat Zachor, which is to remember what Amalek did to us. It is just as important to remember the cause that led to Amalek's battle against the Jews, and that is our weakness in Torah study. Let us commit ourselves to Torah study every day so that we can merit to see Hashem's salvation. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**HAPPY PURIM!!**

Although it is a misvah to drink on Purim, please remember that it is forbidden to endanger one's own life and the lives of others. Please do not drive if you have been drinking.

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
**Visit [DailyHalacha.com](http://DailyHalacha.com), [DailyGemara.com](http://DailyGemara.com),**  
**[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)**  
**Is Moshe Mentioned in Parashat Tesaveh**

When studying the weekly Torah portion, we are generally accustomed to analyzing what's written – the text, the events described, the words that are used, the sequence of presentation, and so on. When it comes to Parashat Tesaveh, however, a lot of attention is given also to what is NOT in the Parasha. Many of our commentators noted the conspicuous absence of Moshe's name from Parashat Tesaveh, a feature that they found surprising. Ever since the story of Moshe's birth in Parashat Shemot, he obviously plays a central role and is mentioned in every other Parasha. Moreover, in the opening verse of the Parasha, where God introduces a new set of commands, we expect to find the standard introduction of "Vayedaber Hashem El Moshe Lemor" ("God spoke to Moshe, saying"). Instead, the Parasha begins with the word "Ve'ata" – "And you" – as though specifically omitting Moshe's name.

The common explanation for the absence of Moshe's name is that this was the fulfillment of a statement

made by Moshe after the sin of the golden calf. God threatened to annihilate Am Yisrael, Heaven forbid, in the wake of that grave incident, and to create a new nation from Moshe. But Moshe pleaded on the nation's behalf, and insisted that if God refused to forgive the nation for their sin, "then erase me, if You please, from Your book" (Shemot 32:32). Meaning, Moshe did not want to form a new nation if God annihilated Beneh Yisrael. God accepted Moshe's prayer and spared Beneh Yisrael, but the words of a Sadik have such power that they are fulfilled even if they are spoken on condition. Thus, Moshe's demand to be "erased" from God's book had to be fulfilled – and thus his name was omitted from one Parasha, Parashat Tesaveh.

Different theories have been suggested for why specifically Parashat Tesaveh was selected as the Parasha from which Moshe's name would be "erased." One explanation is that Parashat Tesaveh is read around the time of 7 Adar, the Yartzheit of Moshe Rabbenu, and it is therefore an appropriate context for "erasing" his name. Others note that Moshe requested that His name be erased "Mi'sifrecha" ("from Your book"), which may be read as "Mi'sefer Chaf" – "from the twentieth book." Parashat Tesaveh is the twentieth Parasha in the Torah, and Moshe's statement was thus fulfilled through his omission from this Parasha.

But there is also another reason why Moshe's name was omitted specifically from this Parasha. Moshe's name consists of three letters – "Mem," "Shin," "Heh." The name of the letter "Mem" is spelled "Mem," "Mem"; the name of the letter "Shin" is spelled "Shin," "Yod," "Nun"; and the name of the letter "Heh" is spelled "Heh" "Alef." If we combine all the secondary letters, meaning, all these letters besides the three letters that actually form Moshe's name, we arrive at a total numerical value of 101. ("Mem" is 40, "Yod" and "Nun" are together 60, and "Alef" is 1.) This is also the numerical value of "Michael," the name of the angel of kindness. Moshe had within him the qualities of this special angel. This is expressed after the sin of the golden calf, when God announced that He would send an angel to accompany the nation to Eretz Yisrael, rather than accompany them Himself (33:2). Moshe begged God to rescind this decree, and God agreed. The angel God wanted to send was Michael, and Moshe was therefore able to avert this decree because he himself had the quality of Michael. He was able to demand that Michael not be sent to the nation because he was like Michael. The angel Michael therefore came to join Beneh Yisrael only later, after Moshe's death, just before Beneh Yisrael began their conquest of the land (see Yehoshua 5:13-15).

Our Sages also teach us that Michael is the angel of memory. Thus, for example, the Gemara (Hagiga 9) states, "One who reviews his material 100 times is not the same as someone who reviews his material 101 times." The angel of forgetfulness is the Satan himself, who is known by the letters "Samech" "Mem" – which have a combined numerical value of 100. If a person studies his material only 100 times, he is still under the power of Satan, who makes him forget his Torah knowledge. But once a student learns the material 101 times, he comes under the power of Michael – whose name has the numerical value of 101 – and this allows him to retain his knowledge. Moshe was the one who brought us the Torah, and it was therefore crucial for him to have this quality of retention, the quality of Michael, within him.

In many editions of the Humash, the number of verses in each Parasha is mentioned after the Parasha, along with a "Siman" – a word that alludes to this number. At the end of Parashat Tesaveh, it is written that there are 101 verses in this Parasha, and the "Siman" is Michael – which has the numerical value of 101. Thus, Moshe's name indeed is in this Parasha, albeit in a subtle form. God had to omit Moshe's name from a Parasha to fulfill his request of "Erase me from Your book," but even so, He did it in a way that Moshe's name would not be absent entirely. Moshe Rabbenu was so beloved to God that even when his name had to be omitted, it was omitted from a Parasha that alludes to Moshe in a different way – by containing 101 verses, alluding to Moshe's special "angelic" quality, his resemblance to the angel Michael

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list  
If you want to receive this article every week,  
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

**Rabbi Wein  
PURIM**

The Megillah of Esther itself tells us that the memory and commemoration of the days of Purim will continue until eternity and never disappear from Jewish life. Extraordinarily, the Talmud expands this statement to mean that even at the end of days when the other commandments of the Torah may no longer be necessary because of the exalted state of spirituality within the Jewish nation and mankind as a whole, the commemoration and memory of the days of Purim will continue even then.

Jews live with a constant Purim story unfolding in all generations and over all time. The story of Purim, as it has come down to us through the writings of Mordechai and Esther, is a story replete with individual characters whose personalities and actions define the story itself. These characters are prototypes for later personalities, ideas, plots and events that occur throughout history.

Every generation is charged with reviewing the story of Purim in its time and to see the events and characters of its generation in the light of the grand heavenly scheme that Purim represents. Surveying today's scene and events, I think that I can identify someone who can fill the bill as far as King Achashveirosh is concerned. I can also cast someone as a humble and destroyed Queen Vashti.

There also are an abundance of tyrants, haters and corrupt officials who certainly can represent Haman in our current reconstruction of the Purim story. Even some of the minor characters of the Megillah, such as Charbonah can be discerned in our current world. But my fantasy Purim story has, as of yet, been unable to fit in the two main characters, the heroic figures that make the story of Purim timeless and eternal.

Who is to play the roles of Mordechai and Esther in our current Purim scenario? Where are they when, seemingly, we need them most? Against all odds, ignoring advice from friends and threats from foes, Mordechai will not kneel nor bow down to false gods and cruel tyrants. Queen Esther for her part risks life and limb, position and honor, wealth and comfort, to come to the aid of her people in their hour of need. She is a Jewess first and only secondarily is she the queen of Persia.

These two people, Mordechai and Esther, have set very high standards for Jewish behavior for all later generations. Criticized from within and persecuted from without, they persevered and through their loyalty and commitment to the Torah, people and the Jewish nation, brought about salvation and triumph.

There are such people amongst us today as well. Our task is to recognize and identify them, strengthen them in their efforts and support them against the misguided other Jews and non-Jews. All of us have the ability to fill in our own playbill with the characters – the heroes and villains, if you will – and construct our own current living Purim story. We live in momentous times where miracles abound for the Jewish people. Just as in the original Purim story the miracles were hidden and not necessarily obvious to all, so too is this the case in our time as well.

It apparently requires dangerous circumstances to bring about some semblance of Jewish unity. Even then, there are always those who dissent, carp and criticize. They were present in Persia long ago when the original Purim story unfolded, and they exist today in various forms, organizations and institutions. They always profess great human goals and deep concern for the future of the Jewish people while at the same time taking actions that are detrimental to the Jewish present and outrightly dangerous to the Jewish future.

Mordechai and Esther are a little too Jewish for them. They are too brash, too stubborn, too clannish and are unnecessarily provocative. Mordechai and Esther in their time did not receive universal approbation. It is only history, in its unfolding of events, that has proven them correct and heroic. We cannot expect that people who aspire to be Mordechai and Esther in our time should be universally accepted, loved, admired.... and followed.

This is a reality of Jewish and human life that must be accepted and factored into the general pursuit of the good and noble. Hidden miracles abound in our current world as far as the Jewish people are concerned. Anyone who has the good fortune of living in the Land of Israel today instinctively realizes this on a daily basis. Let us strengthen ourselves and be determined and strong as our current Purim story unfolds around us.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Architecture of Holiness**

From here to the end of the book of Exodus the Torah describes, in painstaking detail and great length, the construction of the Mishkan, the first collective house of worship of the Jewish people. Precise instructions are given for each item – the Tabernacle itself, the frames and drapes, and the various objects it contained – including their dimensions. So for example we read:

“Make the Tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker. All the curtains are to be the same size—twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide... Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the tabernacle—eleven altogether. All eleven curtains are to be the same size—thirty cubits long and four cubits wide... Make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide...” (Ex. 26:1-16)

And so on. But why do we need to know how big the

Tabernacle was? It did not function in perpetuity. Its primary use was during the wilderness years. Eventually it was replaced by the Temple, an altogether larger and more magnificent structure. What then is the eternal significance of the dimensions of this modest, portable construction?

To put the question more sharply still: is not the very idea of a specific size for the home of the Shekhinah, the Divine presence, liable to mislead? A transcendent God cannot be contained in space. Solomon said so:

“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this Temple I have built.” (1 Kings 8:27)

Isaiah said the same in the name of God Himself:

“Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be?” Isaiah 66:1

So no physical space, however large, is big enough. On the other hand, no space is too small. So says a striking midrash:

When God said to Moses, ‘Make Me a Tabernacle,’ Moses said in amazement, ‘The glory of the Holy One blessed be He fills heaven and earth, and yet He commands, Make me a Tabernacle?’... God replied, ‘Not as you think do I think. Twenty boards on the north, twenty on the south and eight in the west are sufficient. Indeed, I will descend and confine My presence even within one square cubit.’ (Shemot Rabbah 34:1)

So what difference could it make whether the Tabernacle was large or small? Either way, it was a symbol, a focus, of the Divine presence that is everywhere, wherever human beings open their heart to God. Its dimensions should not matter.

I came across an answer in an unexpected and indirect way some years ago. I had gone to Cambridge University to take part in a conversation on religion and science. When the session was over, a member of the audience came over to me, a quiet, unassuming man, and said, “I have written a book I think you might find interesting. I’ll send it to you.” I did not know at the time who he was.

A week later the book arrived. It was called ‘Just Six Numbers’, subtitled ‘The deep forces that shape the universe’. With a shock I discovered that the author was the then Sir Martin, now Baron Rees, Astronomer Royal, later President of the Royal

Society, the oldest and most famous scientific body in the world, and Master of Trinity College Cambridge. In 2011 he won the Templeton Prize. I had been talking to Britain's most distinguished scientist.

His book was enthralling. It explained that the universe is shaped by six mathematical constants which, had they varied by a millionth or trillionth degree, would have resulted in no universe or at least no life. Had the force of gravity been slightly different, for example, the universe would either have expanded or imploded in such a way as to preclude the formation of stars or planets. Had nuclear efficiency been slightly lower the cosmos would consist only of hydrogen; no life would have emerged. Had it been slightly higher there would have been rapid stellar evolution and decay leaving no time for life to evolve. The combination of improbabilities was immense.

Torah commentators, especially the late Nechama Leibowitz, have drawn attention to the way the terminology of the construction of the Tabernacle is the same as that used to describe God's creation of the universe. The Tabernacle was, in other words, a micro-cosmos, a symbolic reminder of the world God made. The fact that the Divine presence rested within it was not meant to suggest that God is here not there, in this place not that. It was meant to signal, powerfully and palpably, that God exists throughout the cosmos. It was a man-made structure to mirror and focus attention on the Divinely-created universe. It was in space what Shabbat is in time: a reminder of creation.

The dimensions of the universe are precise, mathematically exact. Had they differed in even the slightest degree the universe, or life, would not exist. Only now are scientists beginning to realise how precise, and even this knowledge will seem rudimentary to future generations. We are on the threshold of a quantum leap in our understanding of the full depth of the words: "How many are your works, Lord; in wisdom You made them all" (Ps. 104:24). The word "wisdom" here – as in the many times it occurs in the account of the making of the tabernacle – means, "precise, exact craftsmanship" (see Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:54).

In one other place in the Torah there is the same emphasis on precise dimensions, namely, Noah's ark: "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an

opening one cubit high all around" (Gen. 6:14-16). The reason is similar to that in the case of the Tabernacle. Noah's ark symbolised the world in its Divinely-constructed order, the order humans had ruined by their violence and corruption. God was about to destroy that world, leaving only Noah, the ark and what it contained as symbols of the vestige of order that remained, on the basis of which God would fashion a new order.

Precision matters. Order matters. The misplacement of even a few of the 3.1 billion letters in the human genome can lead to devastating genetic conditions. The famous "butterfly effect" – the beating of a butterfly's wing somewhere may cause a tsunami elsewhere, thousands of miles away – tells us that small actions can have large consequences. That is the message the Tabernacle was intended to convey.

God creates order in the natural universe. We are charged with creating order in the human universe. That means painstaking care in what we say, what we do, and what we must restrain ourselves from doing. There is a precise choreography to the moral and spiritual life as there is a precise architecture to the tabernacle. Being good, specifically being holy, is not a matter of acting as the spirit moves us. It is a matter of aligning ourselves to the Will that made the world. Law, structure, precision: of these things the cosmos is made and without them it would cease to be. It was to signal that the same applies to human behaviour that the Torah records the precise dimensions of the Tabernacle and Noah's ark.

#### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

Rabbi Avigdor Miller was asked this question on one of his famous Thursday night classes, Tape #489.

"Should someone pray for a desire for which he prayed many times without results?"

Rabbi Avigdor Miller answered.

"Yes. – Kaveh El Hashem - Hope to Hashem, be strong and He will give your heart courage and hope to Hashem (Tehillim 27:14). Hope to Hashem, be strong and keep on hoping. Never give up hope. There are two benefits. First of all, by continually repeating your request, maybe HaKadosh Baruch Hu will consider you worthy because of your continued requests to Him. Maybe Hashem will consider you worthy and grant you your request. And even if chalah, Hashem sees fit to ignore your requests, you have gained immensely, because prayer changes a man. When you call out to Hashem from the bottom of your heart, you're talking to Somebody,



you become more aware that Hashem is standing in front of you and listening. That's one of the greatest benefits you could ever gain - More Awareness of Hashem. That's why praying to Hashem is so important. When a Jew stands up for שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂרָה Shemonah Esrei, he's standing before the King. We don't see Him, but He sees us, He hears every word, כִּי אַתָּה שׁוֹמֵעַ - You Are Listening To Your People and Your Listening With Compassion. When people pray and they pray very much, they should know that they're learning a great lesson of believing in Hashem and there is nothing greater in life than coming to a true belief in Hashem. Therefore, if Hashem will listen to you and grant your prayers, good, and if He won't, it's also good."

**Jews and Syria: 10 Fascinating Facts  
Syria's once vibrant Jewish community goes  
back thousands of years.  
by Dr. Yvette Alt Miller**

Syria dominates many news headlines today. Here are ten interesting facts about Jewish connections with this ancient country.

**Biblical Origins:** Residents of Aleppo, the northern Syrian city that for millennia was home to a vibrant Jewish community, trace their city's origin to the Jewish patriarch Abraham. Accompanying his flock of sheep through the area, Abraham is thought to have distributed sheep's milk to local residents.

The Hebrew word for milk, halev, became the name of the town. (Aleppo is known as Haleb in both Arabic and Hebrew.)

**Syria in the Torah:** Syria was an important trading partner with Israel in ancient times. Damascus, the present-day capital, was an oasis resting point on trade routes from Mesopotamia to Israel. Jews were present in Syria as far back as the time of King David, who conquered Damascus and briefly appointed governors over the city (II Samuel 8:5-6).

During the reign of the Jewish King Ahab, a local king from Syria named Ben-Hadad waged war against the Kingdom of Judah. God aided King Ahab and his Jewish army, who prevailed, after which Ben-Hadad relinquished his hold on Jewish cities and allowed Jews to trade in Damascus: "The cities that my father took from your father, I shall return; and you may control markets in Damascus, just as my father did in Samaria" (I Kings 20:34).  
Jewish Life

Located adjacent to the ancient Kingdom of Israel, Jews lived in Syria since ancient times. One notable

Jewish resident was Judah haNasi, famous for the redaction of the Mishna, who owned land near present-day Damascus. The Mishna mentions many Syrian cities that were home to Jews in ancient times, including Kefar Karinos, Rom, Aratris, and Beth-Anath.

Maimonides, the great Medieval rabbi, cited the Jewish community of Aleppo as one of the most spiritual and dynamic Jewish communities outside of the land of Israel: "In all the Holy Land and in Syria, there is one city alone and it is Halab (Aleppo) in which there are those who are truly devoted to the Jewish religion and the study of Torah." (Igros U'Teshuvos Rambam, Epstein Publishing, Jerusalem, 5714 pg. 69.) Rambam's monumental philosophical work, Guide for the Perplexed, was written in the form of a letter to a Syrian rabbi, Joseph ben Judah ibn Shimon.  
Spanish Inquisition

When King Ferdinand of Spain expelled his country's thousand-year-old Jewish community, Sultan Beyazid II, ruler of the Ottoman Empire, sent his navy ships to bring Jews to Ottoman lands. "Can you call such a king wise and intelligent?" he asked of King Ferdinand. "He is impoverishing his country and enriching my kingdom!"

Spanish Jews poured into the ancient Jewish communities of Syria. For some generations, these new arrivals kept a distinct culture, speaking Ladino instead of the local Arabic. By the mid-1700s, the Spanish Jews had blended with the other Jewish communities in Syria.  
The Famous Aleppo Codex

In the early Middle Ages, a Jewish scribe named Ben-Asher laboriously hand-copied the Torah and other manuscripts onto parchment, then stitched them together to make a codex, an early form of book. Unlike Torah scrolls, this Codex contained punctuation, vowels and musical notes, making it especially valuable to scholars seeking to understand key Jewish texts.

When Crusaders sacked Jerusalem 1099, they murdered the city's inhabitants – one Christian knight recorded the scene near the Western Wall "where there was such a massacre that our men were wading up to their ankles in enemy blood" – and sacked the city. One treasure taken away for ransom (along with Jewish leaders) was the Codex.

The Codex was eventually bought back from the Crusaders by Jews; in 1375, it was brought to Aleppo, one of the great centers of Jewish Torah

study, and housed in Aleppo's magnificent Grand Synagogue. There, the Codex acquired an almost mystical importance. People would travel to pray near it, and it was said that if the Codex ever left Aleppo, the Jewish community there would cease to exist.

Five hundred years later that prophecy started to become true. In 1947, when the UN voted to create a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, Arab rioters, egged on by government officials, attacked Aleppo's Jewish community, killing scores of Jews and burning many buildings, including the Great Synagogue. The Codex vanished. It was smuggled out of Syria and brought to Israel. It reappeared in 1958 in Jerusalem, but with nearly 200 pages missing. It's thought that some of these pages are in the hands of Syrian Jews who regard them as holy objects; some might have been sold on the black market. The remaining Aleppo Codex today is housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Damascus Blood Libel

Long a fixture in Europe, the infamous blood libel (the lie that Jews kill Christians and use their blood to bake matzah) spread to a land outside of Europe for the first time in 1840, when a Franciscan friar and his servant disappeared in Damascus.

Local Syrian officials, ruled at the time by French colonial authorities, arrested and tortured several prominent Jews, who later tried by the French consul. Two Jews died in prison; one agreed to convert to Islam to save his life. American President Martin Van Buren was so horrified by this use of torture, his Secretary of State noted "he cannot refrain from expressing surprise and pain that in this advanced age such barbarous measures be resorted to in order to compel the confession of imputed guilt."

Rising Anti-Semitism

In December 1947, when the UN voted to partition Palestine into two nations and establish a Jewish state for the first time in two thousand years, the Muslim residents of Aleppo turned on their Jewish neighbors in a frenzy of killing. Urged on by government officials, rioters killed dozens of Jews and burned many buildings, including Aleppo's famed Great Synagogue.

Author Matti Friedman interviewed a survivor of the pogrom: "Howls of rage came from (the rioters) outside. The Jews in Palestine, someone screamed, were cutting Muslim babies from their mothers' wombs. His parents barricaded the family in the main room of the house.... Then the rioters were at the door, and the boy escaped barefoot through a window... When they had taken his family's

valuables, they used the kerosene and coal his parents had been storing for winter to set the building alight" (from *The Aleppo Codex* by Matti Friedman, Algonquin Books, 2012).

Anti-Semitism continued to intensify, and Syria's Jews began to flee, mainly to Israel and the United States. Home to 40,000 Jews in 1947, only a few thousand Jews remained in the country by 1967. Our Man in Damascus

In the 1960s one of the most dapper men about town in Damascus was Kamal Amin Ta'abet, a Syrian who'd lived in Argentina and cultivated connections and friends at the highest levels of Syria's new Ba'athist Government.

In reality, Kamal was Eli Cohen, an Israeli spy, whose wife Nadia was waiting at home for him in Israel. He was born in Egypt to Syrian Jewish parents, then moved to Israel as a child. He volunteered to deep undercover in Syria, despite the incredible dangers.

Eli Cohen at the Golan Heights with Syrian military personnel

One of the greatest threats to Israel at the time was Syria's determination to divert water from the Jordan River, depriving Israel of one of its major sources of water. Syrian troops also used the high mountains of the Golan to fire into Israeli towns and farms. Eli Cohen provided Israel with major intelligence on both issues. After using his contacts to procure a tour of the Golan Heights, Eli suggested that Syrian troops plant trees at their military bases to provide shade and cover; Israel was later able to pinpoint the exact location of military bases from the location of these trees.

In 1965, Eli Cohen was caught sending a secret radio message to Israel. He was arrested, tortured, and publicly executed. Syria continues to refuse to hand over his body, though in late 2016, video of his execution was released for the first time, posted on a Facebook page titled "Syrian Art Treasures". Canadian Grandma Who Rescued Syrian Jews

Judy Feld Carr was an ordinary Ashkenazi Jewish musician living in Toronto with her husband when she first learned about the intense anti-Semitism Syrian Jews faced, and the difficulty the Jewish community had in escaping once the highly anti-Zionist Baath Party came to power in 1963. At the time few people were focused on helping Syrian Jews; most institutional attention was directed to the much larger Soviet Jewish community instead.

Judy and her husband Ronald got in touch with a synagogue in Damascus, and started sending religious items to help the Jewish community there. In 1975, a friend of Judy's went back to Aleppo visit her brother there. The friend was briefly imprisoned back in Syria, and eventually returned to Toronto with a letter from the Jewish community that she managed to smuggle out. "It's a letter that you only see during the times of the Holocaust," Judy Feld Carr explained. "It was a letter written by three rabbis in Aleppo, saying something to the effect that: 'Our children are your children. Get us out of here!'"

Judy started fundraising at her Toronto synagogue and in the Jewish community, and managed to raise money to bribe officials to smuggle a Jew out of Syria. He'd been imprisoned and tortured back in Syria after his children had tried to flee the country. Suffering from cancer, he entered Mt. Sinai Hospital in Toronto. He had only one further request, he told Judy: he wanted to see his elderly, ill mother, who was living in Israel. "Then," he explained, "I can die in Israel." Judy brought him to Israel. The day before he died, Judy visited him. He begged her to smuggle out one of his daughters. Honoring the wish of a dying man, Judy promised, and smuggled out the 19 year old, who went on to marry and build a family in Israel.

"That was the beginning of the ransoming," Judy Feld Carr later explained. One by one, financed by the Dr. Ronald Feld Fund for Jews in Arab Lands at Toronto's Beth Tzedek Synagogue, Judy arranged to smuggle out "exactly 3,228 Jews – one at a time" over the next 28 years.

"Let's face it," Judy told The Times of Israel in 2012, "I'm a mommy who lives in Toronto. I'm not an expert in foreign intrigue.... It doesn't blend at all with what my former profession was and being a mother of six kids". Judy never visited Syria, and for years toiled in secret, in incredible danger, as her identity became known to Syrian security forces. Only in the 1990s was her work recognized.

In 1995, Israel's then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin wrote to the Toronto grandmother: "Words cannot express my gratitude to you for 23 years of hard and dangerous work. Very few people, if any, have contributed as greatly as you have. The Jews of Syria who were rescued and the State of Israel owe you so much, and will never be able to reward you as you deserve."

### Helping Syrian Refugees Today

Since Syria's civil war broke out in 2013, over 2,000 Syrians have been smuggled into Israel to receive

life-saving medical treatment. The Ziv Medical Center in Safed has treated over 800 wounded Syrians, making it one of the largest treatment centers for Syrians anywhere. Syria remains formally at war with Israel and refuses to recognize the Jewish state. When Syrians who were treated in Israel return to Syria, they cannot tell people where they've been; Israeli medical personnel remove all Hebrew writing from medication and equipment to protect their Syrian patients.

Israelis are helping Syrians in other ways too.

Israeli businessman Moti Kahana has spent over \$2.2 million of his own money to send humanitarian aid to southern Syria. He founded Amaliah, meaning "work of God" in Hebrew, which helps coordinate Israeli volunteers and the Israeli army as they send food, medicine, drinking water and educational materials to Syria. Amaliah also helps bring Syrians to Israeli hospitals and organizes empowerment workshops for Syrian women. In September 2016, when the UN found it too dangerous to bring emergency aid into Syria during the Muslim festival of Eid, Amaliah worked with the Israeli Defense Forces to transport a ton of meat into the country.

Another Israeli organization, "Operation Blossom of Hope" uses crowdsourcing to raise money to help Syrian refugees stranded in Europe. Founded by Israeli humanitarian worker Shachar Zahavi, Operation Blossom of Hope set up fifty drop-off sites around Israel, raising over one and a half ton of donated winter supplies for the refugees including coats, sweaters, boots, warm socks, blankets and sleeping bags.

Israeli humanitarian organization Israel Flying Aid (IFA) has been operating in Syria since 2011, training and equipping nearly 2,000 of the famed "White Helmets": volunteers who conduct search and rescue missions amid rubble from Syria's lethal war. IFA also has trained 22 doctors and many medical technicians. For years, IFA volunteers worked in Syria without revealing their Israeli identity. When her colleagues first learned she is Israeli, recalls Gal Lusky, IFA's founder and CEO, one of her Syrian colleagues stood up and declared "Now I understand. You are not even my friend. You are my enemy. After Assad, we are coming for you next." Despite such sentiments, Israeli IFA volunteers continue to provide vital, life-saving aid to Syrians.