

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYAKHEL/PEKUDEI/PARAH
MARCH 13-14, 2015 23 ADAR 5775

In Memory of Margie Kassin – 29 Adar
PLEASE PRINT COPIES AS RABBI DAVID IS IN FLORIDA

Candle lighting Friday evening March 13 at 6:41 p.m. Mincha at 6:40, Shir HaShirim 6:30

SHABBAT: No Morning Shaharit Class This week –
Please let us know if we should keep this class over the summer.

Lets try Shaharit - Hashem Melech 8:45 and Baruch SheAmar at 9:00 AM –
Shema this week 9:27

Double Perasha and Parah makes for a very long Torah reading
Derasha this week by our guest Torah Reader – Rabbi David Azerod

Kiddush Sponsored by Vadim and Oksana Goland on the birth of their daughter.
Congratulations to the grandparents Gennady Goland and Inna Zapasner and George and Sofiya Davydov!

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one.
Our weekly Kiddush will be subject to sponsorship. We would love to see the sponsorship board filled.

Dairy Kiddush sponsorship will be \$300, \$400 for Deluxe and \$ 500 for Super Deluxe
Meat Kiddush sponsorship will be \$400, \$600 for Deluxe and \$1000 for Super Deluxe

Although the cost of Seuda Shelishi has been covered, we will still take sponsors – at \$100 for the class each week. And Sunday and weekday breakfasts are \$100 ea

If we get no sponsor then we will do our best to prepare a minimal Kiddush
based on the Yusupov/Pinto/ Bibi Bakery sponsorship only.

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer
Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/
Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at Sephardic March, April and May at 3:30 PM
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Pirkey Avot with Rav Aharon at 5:40
Minha at 6:10
Seudah Shelishi with Rav Aharon at 6:40
Arbit at 7:30 Followed by Havdala - Shabbat Ends at 7:41

Sunday morning class with Rabbi Yaakov Siegel at 9AM
Krav Maga at 10AM
We would like to do Sunday Mincha and Arbit at 6:30PM

Metallic Blue - Movie night will be this Sunday @ 7 PM – We are joining with The Lido Beach Synagogue, The Young Israel of Long Beach, and Hadassah for our next movie night on Sunday, March 15th at 7:00

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ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

THE WINNING TICKET

Imagine a man who holds the \$400 million winning lottery ticket. It remains in his pocket and never gets cashed while he bemoans his situation. What a fool! Well the fool is me and that fool is you. With mounting scholarship requests, we long for assistance for our schools, our children and their parents. But help is there and we simply don't take it. Hundreds of millions of dollars has been set aside for Jewish education in the Diaspora. Because we don't step up and vote, that money is being directed by our reform and conservative neighbors to their schools, to their synagogues and to their programs. Isn't it time that we woke up and took our seat at the table? Vote in the World Zionist Organization's election. Visit www.myvoteourisrael.com and cast a ballot for the slate of our World Sephardic Zionist Organization – Ohavei Zion. For our children's sake, help us cash in that lottery ticket. Spread this message and get everyone on your own lists to vote. For more information visit ohaveizion.com or contact Lana Eliyahu at lana.eliyahu@gmail.com

Rabbi Sam Kassin writes: The World Zionist Organization is the most important election in the Jewish Diaspora today. With the election you hold the future of the Jewish people in your hands.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been allotted to the Diaspora for Jewish renewal, outreach, continuity and identity. Never before has the Sephardic community received funds.

By putting Sephardic rabbis, educators and laymen on the board, we can ensure Jewish continuity in the Sephardic diaspora.

This vote will drive policy for the next five years, so your vote really counts!

Please register at wszo.org and please vote for the World Sephardic Zionist Organization!

There is a small fee of \$5 or \$10 depending on when you were born. You must be 18 to vote

Editors Notes

One of the things I enjoy most about the morning class is that it's so informal and we often jump from subject to subject based on questions and comments.

After discussing the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer on Tuesday, on Wednesday morning we moved to this week's portion and jumped from point to point and hopefully walked away with a lesson. I tried giving it over to Chantelle late last night but one or both of us fell asleep somewhere in the middle. I hope the written word does as good as we did in class. The lesson is in fact one of the lessons that Rabbi Abittan stressed very often.

The second portion Pikudey is an accounting. According to the Talmud and the Midrash, the Israelites stood behind Moses and commented on how thick his neck was getting. In ancient parlance, I guess this meant he was gaining weight, but what they really meant was that Moses was getting very wealthy. And the comment also included an accusation that the wealth must be from taking a piece of everything donated. It's hard to believe but of anybody ever, the one guy who we might never accuse is Moses. It is really difficult to imagine Moses being accused of skimming the charity fund off the top. In response to the accusations, Moshe does a detailed accounting showing where each and every donation went.

Jump back to last week's portion when we read about the incident of the Golden Calf. The Midrash tells us that when Moses was delayed in returning from Mount Sinai and the people began to worry. Satan showed them an image of Moses' corpse in a coffin being taken for burial. No wonder why they felt a need to replace him. But what gave the Satan the right or the power to play such a trick? How in fact could he show Moshe as dead if in fact Moshe was alive?

Jump back a few more weeks. The people cross the sea. They are on their way to Mount Sinai and Amalek attacks. Moses commands Joshua to gather men and fight Amalek. And later on Hashem tells Moses that he should command Joshua to know that G-d will wipe out Amalek in the future and we must remember. Why didn't Moses lead the battle? Why be specific in the command towards Joshua? And what does Moses do during the battle? He climbs the mountain and raises his hands, but he gets tired and Aaron and Chur must come and each must hold an arm up and Moses is given a rock to rest on. What do you mean Moses got tired? Moses who at 120 was still as strong as ever got tired and didn't go to war? Moses who faced up to Pharaoh, who would fight the giant Og, and who would live with angels for months couldn't hold his hands up? And even more confusing is Rashi who says that Moses was lazy. So we accuse Moses of stealing and we accuse him of being lazy? What's next?

Let's jump back even further. We all know that Cain Killed Abel – Kayin killed Hevel. We know that Kayin was jealous because his offering was not accepted while his brothers' offering was accepted. Hevel seems the innocent. But one midrash tells us that in fact, he wasn't. Hevel had livestock and his job was to take them to pasture. But one day Hevel got lazy and decided that instead of taking out the animals he would borrow some hay from his brother the farmer, but neglected to tell him and we call that stealing.

Hevel though was a bit like his dad. Where was Adam when the snake approached Eve? Why would anyone leave his wife with a snake? The Rabbis tell us that Adam was sleeping. But he was just created and G-d had told him that he had a job. His job was to work the land and watch the land and instead he went to sleep. And then to make matters worse, by taking the one thing he was forbidden to take, he became more than just lazy. He became a thief.

Look at what laziness can do. It can turn someone into a thief.

King Solomon is greatly concerned with laziness and devotes many verses in the book of Proverbs to it's dangers. Let us not forget though that on the day Solomon's magnificent temple was to be consecrated, the King was missing. Where was he? The Rabbi's tell us that he was sleeping late and his mother Bat Sheba had to wake him up while the people waited. Even the teacher of Proverbs is guilty of the deed.

In two weeks we will sit down to a seder and eat Matzah. Why Matzah? We read in the Hagada that we eat Matzah because when we were leaving, we rushed and the dough had no time to rise. In fact the night before we left Egypt as the Angel of Death killed the Egyptian first born, we had our first Seder and we were dressed and ready to go. No laziness and no delay.

Rabbi Abittan reminded us again and again that the first commandment the Tur codifies is to rise each morning like a lion. When it comes to a Misvah, be zeriz, be quick to jump at it. Don't be lazy and don't delay, because the ramifications are tragic. The trick of the evil inclination is delay. He tells us, "sleep a bit more, you'll be stronger". The Satan whispers, "Don't worry about that misvah, you'll do a bigger good deed later on". To battle the inclination we cannot delay. What's the difference between matzah and chametz,? It's only a second. Delay a bit, let the evil inclination in, (represented by the rising yeast) and it's over.

Each of us as children of Adam have the evil inclination and this delay gene built in. It seems we are inherently lazy. Its up to us to set aside the laziness and to run and do a misvah. It's too easy to lose the opportunity, and a moment, once gone, will never return.

Rabbi Aderet quoting Rabbi Isaac Luria tells us that Moses was a gilgul or reincarnation of Hevel. Rav Basri writes that the name Moshe has three letters – Mem for Moshe, Shin for Shet or Seth, the third son of Adam who is born to replace Hevel, and Heh for Hevel himself. The soul of Hevel comes back after his murder in the body of his brother Shet and eventually returns in Moses himself.

Rashi says Moses was lazy. How? He got it from the root of his soul which was Hevel? That's where the accusation of stealing comes from as well. The people say that just as Hevel stole, Moses is a thief and Moses must do an accountating to set aside their fears.

Now if the lesson is trying to teach that Moses, the greatest of all men, was susceptible to being lazy, what about us? Because Moses didn't go to war against Amalek and Joshua did, it was determined then and there that Moses wouldn't enter the land. Who leads the people into the land? Joshua would lead them and therefore Joshua is commanded in remembering Amalek. The Satan by showing Moses in a coffin was showing that as a result of his laziness, Moses would die.

The Satan is very powerful, but Hashem gave us a tool to battle the evil inclination and that tool is Pesach. Pesach or Passover derives from "Hashem passing over". To pass over, one must jump. Perhaps this is the message of Passover. Don't delay! Be zeriz and run to do a misvah when the opportunity arises. Do the misvah, because if we delay Matzah becomes Hametz. Kosher becomes non kosher and holy becomes profane.

Rabbi Abittan would tell us to remember this thought when presented with a misvah. Don't delay, just do it!

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Next week ... the continuation of the class or when Rabbi Abittan told us when its good to delay

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The Parsha begins with the Mitzvah of Shabbos and the penalty for her transgression. Note that Pasuk 35:5 is classic proof of the Oral Law. Those who deny the Oral Law must explain the literal translation of this verse to prohibit having any burning flame on Shabbos. This would forbid the use of lights, heat, and even Shabbos candles! It is the Oral Law which teaches us that the G-d's prohibition was directed at lighting a fire, not having a fire. Moshe asked the Bnai Yisroel to donate the time, talents, and materials for the construction of the Mishkan. The Bnai Yisroel responded with unbridled enthusiasm.

2nd Aliya: Talents and materials were donated and Betzallel and Oholiav were appointed as chief architects and artists. The response to Moshe's appeal was so great that Moshe had to command the people to stop their donations! (see, miracles do happen!) The outer coverings of the Mishkan and the inner tapestries are detailed. The beams of the Mishkan, the Aron Hakodesh, and the Shulchan - Table are described.

3rd & 4th Aliyot: The Menorah and the inner Golden Altar are described. The outer ramped Altar, the Washstand, and the Mishkan's surrounding enclosure are detailed. Pekudei begins with an accounting of the materials used in the construction of the Mishkan. (gold = 4,386.5 lb./ silver = 15,088.75 lb./ copper = 10,620 lb.)

5th & 6th Aliyot: The Kohein Gadol's breastplate and vest are described. The remaining garments of the Kohein Gadol and the other Kohanim are detailed,

and Moshe inspects the completed Mishkan. Moshe certifies that the entire project followed the exact details of Hashem's instructions. Moshe blesses the workers.

7th Aliya: On the 1st day of Nissan, 2449, the Mishkan was assembled. After every vessel was properly in place, the presence of Hashem, the Shechina, descended in a cloud and filled the Mishkan

PARAH: This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read the section known as Parah. The additional sections of Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and Chodesh are read prior to Pesach for both commemorative and practical reasons. Shekalim, the first additional section, dealt with the 1/2 Shekel and the public sacrifices. The reading of the second section, Zachor, facilitated our fulfillment of the Mitzvah to remember the evil of Amalek. The two sections of Parah and Chodesh are directed toward our preparations for Pesach.

On Parshas Parah, we read the section found in the beginning of Parshas Chukas known as Parah. This section discusses the necessary steps that had to be followed to remove the impurity which caused by having had contact with a dead person. This process involved a seven day period during which the impure - Tameh person underwent a process involving the ashes of the Red Heifer. The process was facilitated by a Kohen, and had to take place in Yerushalayim.

The status of being Tameh restricted a person from entering into the Temple compound and / or participating in certain select activities. Although these restrictions are less applicable today because we do not have the Bais Hamikdash; nevertheless, it is incumbent upon all people, male and female, to keep these laws to the degree that they do apply.

In the time of the Bais Hamikdash it was required of every male adult to visit the Bais Hamikdash and offer a sacrifice a minimum of three times a year: Pesach, Shevout, and Succoth. However, it was even more important to be there on Erev Pesach to sacrifice the Korban Pesach - Pascal Lamb. Anyone who happened to be Tameh, from having had contact with a dead body, would have to undergo the process of the Parah Adumah - the Red Heifer, to remove the status of Tameh and be allowed to bring his Pascal Lamb to the Bais Hamikdash.

The Talmud tells us that the furthest point in Israel from Yerushalayim was a two weeks travel. If so, a person who was Tameh living two weeks travel away would require a minimum of three weeks to arrive in

Yerushalayim with sufficient time to go through the one week process of the Red Heifer and be able to offer his Korban Pesach. Therefore, Chazal ordained the reading of Parah on the week before the reading of Chodesh as a public reminder to those who are Tameh that they must immediately arrange to get to Yerushalayim so that they can purify themselves in time to bring the Korban Pesach.

This week's Haftorah reflects the reading of Parshas Parah. Yechezkel, the prophet, berated the people for their defection away from G-d. Their behavior defiled Eretz Yisroel rendering them unfit to remain within her boundaries. Therefore, the Jews had to be exiled from their land and dispersed among the nations. The exile and the consequent suffering while in exile would serve as a process purification process for the nation. In essence, the exile would be a national Parah Adumah - Red Heifer.

Central to the theme of the Haftorah is the fact that Hashem ultimately redeems the nation, "for His own sake." While in exile the Jews are able to spread the word of G-d and teach His existence to the other nations. However, exile will also take its toll on the Jews. The Jews interaction with other nations will result in furthering the very defection which caused G-d to first punish the nation.

Among the mysteries of the Parah Adumah is the fact that the Kohen who administers the ashes becomes impure while the recipient of the ashes becomes pure. In essence this is the experience of the Jew in exile. The Jews have brought knowledge and understanding of G-d to the nations wherein which they were exiled, while at the same time suffering terrible persecution and assimilation through their association with the non-Jewish world. The nations have become pure while the Jews have become impure.

In the end G-d will redeem the nation and gather them in from the four- corners of the earth, "for His own sake." The time will come when the purpose of the Jew in exile will have been fulfilled. Then, there will be no further reason for the Jew to remain among the other nations and G-d will renew His covenant with the Bnai Yisroel and return them to Eretz Yisroel

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"These are the reckonings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony, reckoned at Moshe's bidding." (Shemot 38:21)

The Midrash states that there were unscrupulous Jews who accused Moshe of taking

materials donated to the Mishkan for his personal use. To prove his integrity, as soon as the Mishkan was completed, Moshe made a thorough accounting of all of the donated materials used in building the Mishkan, and publicized it.

Rabbi Dani Staum mentions the Oznayim Latorah that says, that in regard to the Egel, the golden calf, which was also constructed out of donated materials, there was no such demand for an accounting of how the money was spent.

This attitude has remained part of the Jewish people throughout the generations. Wherever a collection is made for holy and worthy causes, there is always a demand that the record books of the charity be made public. Yet when money is amassed for sinful causes there is no demand to see how the money is used.

In the heart of a Jew there is a deeply embedded desire to fulfill the bidding of his Creator. When a Jew donates money to sedakah he wants to ensure that what he has given is truly being used for holy causes. However, when a Jew gives money for the proverbial "golden calf," deep inside him his heart grieves over his sinful donation. In such a case he subconsciously wishes that his money not be used for its intended purpose, and therefore he has no interest in "seeing the books." Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"See how Hashem has chosen Besal'el, son of Uri, son of Hur" (Shemot 35:30)

Moshe told the Jewish people, "See how Hashem has chosen Besal'el, son of Uri, son of Hur to oversee the Mishkan." The Rabbis tell us that some people complained to Moshe, "Everyone who has a high position is related to you." Besal'el was a great-nephew of Moshe and the people wanted to know why he was privileged to be in charge of the Mishkan.

Hashem answered the people by describing the lineage of Besal'el. His grandfather was Hur, who was killed trying to stop the people from doing the golden calf. We could have imagined that what Hur did was a great act personally, but what could it benefit his family in the future? The answer is that when someone has self-sacrifice, it is never forgotten. Rather, it will end up helping his family in the future. The sacrifice of Hur trying to stop the golden calf resulted in the appointment of his grandson to build the Mishkan. And we know that the main goal of the Mishkan was to atone for the golden calf. No good deed is ever overlooked, especially one that involves sacrifice. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

**Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
 The Shabbat Misconception**

Parashat Vayakhel begins with the command of Shabbat observance. Moshe instructs the people, "Work shall be done for six days, and on the seventh there shall be for you a holy Shabbat..."

Earlier, in Parashat Yitro, God presents the Misva of Shabbat as part of the Ten Commandments, where He declares, "You shall work for six days...and on the seventh there shall be a Shabbat for Hashem your God" (Shemot 20:9-10).

There are two obvious differences between these two commands. First, here in Parashat Vayakhel, Moshe speaks of work "being done" during the six days of the workweek, rather than of people engaging in work. Whereas in the Ten Commandments the Torah describes the people working, here it speaks in the passive form, of work being done. Secondly, in the Ten Commandments, Shabbat is presented as a day "for Hashem your God." In Parashat Vayakhel, by contrast, Moshe describes it as "Lachem" – "for you."

One explanation is that these two verses refer to two different groups of people – the Torah scholars and the laymen. The scholars spend their week immersed in Torah study, and are supported by the Jewish communities so that they would not have to work and could devote all their time to Torah. It is in reference to them that the Torah says, "Work shall be done for six days." The Talmideh Hachamim do not engage in work, but rather benefit from the work of those who support them so they can study Torah. Their Shabbat is described as a day "for you." Shabbat is given to them as a day of relaxation, when they can spend more time eating and resting than they do during the week. In the Ten Commandments, however, the Torah speaks of the majority of the people, who spend the workweek engaged in professional pursuits, and it therefore says, "You shall work for six days." They must observe Shabbat as "a Shabbat for Hashem your God," as a day of spiritual elevation. The time they were unable to spend learning Torah during the workweek must be made up on Shabbat. For them, Shabbat is intended a time of spiritual rejuvenation, an opportunity to focus on Torah and prayer.

There is a misconception that Shabbat is a "day of rest," a day that should be spent eating, socializing, sleeping and just "hanging around." This is incorrect. Those who spend the week working or tending to their businesses must utilize Shabbat as a precious opportunity for Torah. Shabbat is not a day of rest –

it is a day when we refrain from work so we can devote the time to spiritual growth.

Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, the famous Kabbalist who composed the "Lecha Dodi" hymn which we recite every Friday night, describes Shabbat as "Mekor Ha'beracha" – the source of blessing. In America it is called a "weekend," but for us, Shabbat is the middle of the week, the day which infuses the rest of the week with blessing. If we make an effort to utilize Shabbat for its intended purpose, as a day of spiritual growth and inspiration, then it will serve as well its role as a source of great blessing and prosperity that will be bestowed upon us and accompany us throughout the workweek.

**Rabbi Wein
 IMPUDENCE AND IMPOTENCE**

It has been a strange and difficult winter weather-wise both in the United States and here in Israel. Jerusalem has absorbed two major snowstorms and the country as a whole felt bitter cold and even snow in areas of our land that are certainly not accustomed to such happenings. The United States has been in the grip of an Arctic polar vortex that has made snow and cold very unpopular words over most of the country.

Not long ago, the world was coming to an end because of global warming. However, since over the past decade no discernible warming is taking place and empirically we are experiencing more bitter winters than what we have felt to be usual, the mantra has now been changed from global warming to climate change. The only problem with climate change is that climate always changes and that there is little that human beings can do to prevent, control or regulate those changes.

Science is convinced – at least in the public pronouncements of many leading scientists – that somehow steps can be taken to alter climate change. By so stating, they crossed the line that separates scientific fact from oftentimes impudent hubris and wishful thinking. When it comes to nature, and weather is definitely a function of nature, we humans remain pretty much impotent when it comes to dealing with its vagaries.

I am not an expert in science or weather and am not one to venture an opinion as to whether carbon emissions that are man-made are the main culprit for climate change. However, I think that in light of all of the adjustments, refinements and retractions of previously sacredly held theories advanced by

scientists of note over the ages, caution would be wise when discussing the causes of climate change.

Perhaps climate has always changed and has always moved in cycles, as is true for many other facets of the natural world. We are fascinated by nature and a great deal of this fascination is due to its mystery and nonconformity.

Science could learn a great deal from religion in terms of humility. Religion itself can also benefit greatly from its own lesson of humility. Religion can also benefit from the methodology, curiosity and knowledge that science brings to our civilization.

One of the main lessons of religion is that no matter how great, wise, ingenious and innovative human beings are, there are limits to human abilities and that many of the basic questions of life and nature will remain unanswered. Many of the major human and social disasters over the millennia of human existence can be laid at the doorstep of unjustified certainty, impudent arrogance and an unwarranted exuberance of self. I

t is this self-importance and self-aggrandizement that allows experts in one field of academia to also assume the mantle of expertise in politics, diplomacy and government even though they may be woefully unequipped to do so.

The Talmud teaches us that in pre-messianic times impudence will increase and become the norm of human behavior. The lack of humility on the part of many of the world's leaders has made us uncomfortable and vulnerable. The senior partner in the law firm that I once worked for had a sign on his wall that read: "Do not confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up!" Unfortunately, much of the world believes and behaves in such a fashion as well.

Because we are blessed with extensive knowledge and amazing technological advances it is difficult for us to admit that in many areas of life we are still powerless and ignorant. What results is that oftentimes the most learned and expert of us are the most arrogant and insufferable of all humans.

The Talmud held up the great Hillel and his descendent Rabi Yehuda HaNassi, as role models of Jewish leadership, not so much for their Torah erudition as for their humility, self-effacement and acceptance of the imperfect human state in life. The Talmud emphasizes that the only human characteristic where extremism is allowed, and in fact encouraged, is that of humility.

Humility saves one from impudence and serves as the necessary trait for the refinement of our ideas and behavior. The person who feels that he or she is always right is usually wrong. In fact, belief in one's own infallibility is, in my opinion, the punishment itself for that arrogance of soul. Perhaps we should enjoy the climate change that we are apparently undergoing, to the extent possible, and realize that Mark Twain's dictum that there is not much we can do about the weather remains true and valid

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Spirit of Community

What do you do when your people has just made a golden calf, run riot and lost its sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order - not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: Vayakhel. But to understand it we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties, one from England, the other from France, set out on voyages of discovery that would change them, and eventually our understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the Beagle took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species. Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book: Democracy in America.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions – the same conclusion God taught Moses after the episode of the golden calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true of humans also. But this left him with serious problem.

If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then everywhere ruthlessness should prevail. But it doesn't. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all,

and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest." [1]

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next generation. But civilization works at the level of the group.

As he put it, "a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection." How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved." [2]

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms involved. [3] We survive as groups. One man versus one lion: lion wins. Ten men against one lion: the lion may lose. *Homo sapiens*, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language. We can communicate. We have culture. We can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal.

Meanwhile in America Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to try to understand the role of religion in democratic America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite. "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." [4]

This did not make sense to him at all, and he asked

Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues.

Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone."

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary associations, what in Judaism we call *chevrot*. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the "art of association," and said about it that it was "the apprenticeship of liberty."

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said, "I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country" [5]

So religion safeguarded the "habits of the heart" essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it *Bowling Alone*.^[6] It was a phrase that summed up the loss of "social capital," that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups and professional associations. They get involved, turn up and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender or race. Perhaps the most interesting of Putnam's findings was that these attributes were related not to people's religious beliefs but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.^[7]

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the golden calf was *Vayakhel*: turn the Israelites into a *kehillah*, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the calf, the Torah says the people

were *peruah*, meaning "wild, disorderly, chaotic, unruly, tumultuous." He "saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies." They were not a community but a crowd.

He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the *mishkan*, the sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the *mishkan* are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together.^[8] Hence the *mishkan*. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together: in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the *mishkan* were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a *minyan*. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules that "One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people -- such a person has no share in the world to come."^[9]

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest the flight of the alone to the Alone. Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is as a community that we come before God. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

Vayakhel is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the golden calf. We find God in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the

work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a kehillah, a community.

[1] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Princeton University Press, 1981, 158-84.

[2] *Ibid.*, 166.

[3] This is the argument between E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins. See Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, New York: Liveright, 2012. And the review by Richard Dawkins in *Prospect Magazine*, June 2012.

[4] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, abridged with an introduction by Thomas Bender, New York, Modern Library, 1981, 182.

[5] *Ibid.*, 185.

[6] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[7] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

[8] See Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, Continuum, 2007.

[9] Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3: 11.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

“Six days you may do work, and on the Seventh Day shall be for you a holiness of Shabbat of Shabbathon to Hashem” (35:2)

The Gemara says: “Pesiah gasa-stepping hastily, takes away 1/500 of a man’s eyesight” (Berachot 43B).

When you are anxious and worried, running here and there, your eyesight is affected. Eye specialists will tell you that excitement often affects the eyes. David Hamelech said “Ashesha mika’as eini” ((Tehillim 6:8). “My eyes became worn out from ka’as, anger.” So be careful of ka’as; it could ruin your eyes. The hasty footstep of pesiah gasa, the anxiety that plagues us all week, takes away 1/500 of man’s eyesight.

Mai takanato?, what is the remedy?, the Gemara asks, that will restore his eyesight? Drink from the Kiddush he makes Friday night. How does this happen? You were so tired and so worried, but you’ve finally made it. Now you are standing dressed in bigdei/clothing of Shabbat, with the wine in your hand, and it is all behind you. You are declaring that it was all a waste of worries, a waste of anxiety.

“Vayechulu Hashamayim Veha’aretz”, everything was done by Hashem until now, and He is still in charge,

conducting our affairs. Shabbat is a great consolation. Hashem says, “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of everything. You keep on doing what you’re supposed to be doing, and leave everything to Me. I’ll worry for you.” That is what Shabbat tells us, and that is the way to restore your eyesight.

This is the lesson of the Mann:

Don’t be in anxiety

Everything is under control

You will succeed

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge

Whatever happens is for the best

And the Best is what Hashem considers the Best.

Quoted from “Rabbi Avigdor Miller Speaks” Artscroll

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