

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TISA

Haftarah: Melachim I 18:20-39

MARCH 6-7, 2015 16 ADAR 5775

DEDICATIONS: in memory of Rhoda Benson, Rachel Bat Eliyahu z"l, 19 Adar.
Meyer Cohen ben Regina, and Lillian bat Esther
Sunday, at 2AM we move clocks forward 1 hour

Candle lighting Friday evening March 6, 5:33 p.m. Mincha at 5:33

SHABBAT: Perasha class with Rav Aharon at 8:30AM this week
Shaharit - Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:33AM

Sam and Roni Shetrit invite you to join them as their son Moshe is called to the Torah as a Bar Mitzvah. All are invited to a gala kiddush following services. We want to wish Moshe, Roni and Sam, the grandparents and all the family, Mazal Tov on the beautiful occasion.

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one

Early Mincha after Kiddush - Begin at 12:20 and Amidah after 12:35
This is the last week for early Mincha

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 the Bach all February at 3:30 PM
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 4:30

Shabbat Ends at 6:33 - Return for Arbit at 6:50
Movie Night Tonight 02/28/15 sponsored by Bob Kraus at 7:30

Ilana Austin asked us to please announce a scotch, wine and bourbon tasting event at Young Israel, this motzei shabbat at 8 pm. Wine will be available to be ordered for Pesach.

Sunday, at 2AM we move clocks forward 1 hour

Sunday morning class with Sam Yusupov at 9AM
Jack Azizo is sponsoring breakfast and the class Sunday morning
And we want to thank Albert Yusupov for sponsoring last week's class in honor of Daniel and Mikhayla.

Krav Maga at 10AM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00

Once again, we will join Lido Beach Synagogue, The Young Israel of Long Beach, and Hadassah for our next movie night on Saturday, March 14th at 7:30. Suggested Donation: \$5

Mettallic Blue, a tragicomedy, concerns two Israeli car salesman who think that a rare 1985 Lincoln Continental limousine, which falls into their laps, will net them as much as 50,000 Euros. They sail with the vehicle to Germany in order to sell it. The task is not as easy as they had hoped, and they are confronted with a number of emotional issues.

Kiddush News - As you all know we were unsure of how to replace the incredible weekly donation we were receiving from Steinbergs. We still receive and we are remain grateful to Bagel Delight for the weekly Bagel Donation. With the help and sponsorship of the Yusupov and Bibi Families, weekly baked goods, beginning next Shabbat have been sponsored for the year. We will receive challot, cookies and other items each Friday afternoon to be used for Kiddush and Seudat Shelishi.

Moving forward, each week, our Kiddush will be subject to sponsorship.

Dairy Kiddush sponsorship will be \$300 to \$500 depending on the menu

Meat Kiddush sponsorship will be \$400 to \$1000 and up depending on the menu

Seuda Shelishi will be \$100

Please speak with Rebetzin Ida to reserve a date.

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

Albert reminded us that when we sponsor a Kiddush or the years' worth of baked goods in memory of a loved one, then every blessing said during the meal is credited to those who have passed. Albert explained that this is a great value. It was also suggested that the Kiddush brings people to Synagogue so that zechut also goes leiluy nishmat.

So please take a moment and reserve a Kiddush and a Seudah Shelishi for one of the weekends this spring and summer in advance. We need your help and we greatly appreciate it.

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to 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 lane.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

As Purim fades into Shushan Purim, we are all a bit numbed. Perhaps it was the food and drink at the seuda. Maybe it was the sugar rush from too many tastes out of the mishloach manot baskets? Or perhaps it's simply the snow (I always thought Purim is supposed to be a beautiful day even in February and here we are in March with 8" of snow). And although we've listened to and read the Megillah twice, let me leave you with one Purim thought that I promised to write about last week.

On Shabbat, I recalled that about 35 years ago as I was turning 18, I received a gift. A well-known astrologer prepared my astrological charts based on the exact time and place of my birth. She recorded her findings and predictions on a cassette. Uncomfortable listening to the cassette, I set it aside in a box. Then about 15 years ago, we were learning with Rabbi Abittan, z"sl and we were discussing astrology and if in fact there were astrologers who were more than just charlatans. I mentioned the never listened to tape and the Rabbi suggested I bring it back and we listen to it and see if there was anything to her predictions. That night, I searched through the box of mixed tapes from the 70's and found it. The next day we listened to it together.

I was in shock. She hit the nail on the head, again and again. She detailed so much of what I actually experienced over the prior twenty years. How did she do it? Should I have listened to it back then? Would it have helped and guided me? Rabbi Abittan explained that in hindsight the picture seems clear but had I listened to it earlier, it most likely would have messed me up as the words would have weighed on me and would have in reality misguided me. This is why he explained the Torah forbids it. This is why he was so against people running off to fortune tellers and soothsayers no matter how religious they or their clothes appeared to be. There were "holy" women who read coffee grinds and tea leaves and "holy" men who read one's palm or who dissected a person through their name. All of these should be avoided.

Now how does this relate to the Megillah? The most puzzling character in the story is the King who because of his strange behavior is alternately called a fool and a genius. But I believe something else is at play.

A bit of history based on the Talmud mesechet Megilah. Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and later destroyed the Temple. He reigned 45 years. Evil Merodach follows and reigns for 23 years. Belshatzar who is famous for

the writing on the wall story with Daniel follows and rules for a year miscalculating the 70 years of exile as beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He celebrates but was killed the same night when the power transfers to Persia and Medes.

Darius takes over and rules for about 2 years and is succeeded by his partner and son in law Koresh or Cyrus who rules for three years. Cyrus allows some Jewish exiles to return and initially permits the rebuilding of the Temple, although he has second thoughts when he sees the economically strong Judeans leaving his country. Achashverosh or Xerxes, although not the eldest son of Cyrus, manages to be named heir and becomes king. He is definitely paranoid perhaps feeling that he rules undeservedly or just as he grasped power, power will be taken from him (And we see he has reason to fear assuming the rebellion of Bigtan and Teresh was not an isolated event). The rebuilding project is completely stopped. In the third year of his reign, he makes a party celebrating seventy years since the original Babylonian exile began and the fact that the prophecy has not come to be and that the Temple will not be rebuilt. Considering this, it's puzzling why any Jews would attend this celebration. But I wonder why it was so important that the Temple not be rebuilt.

Then we have the story of Haman. He approaches the King and proposed destroying the Jewish people. The Rabbis say that as much as Haman hated the Jews, the King hated them more. Again the question is why?

When Esther approaches the King, he promises her up to half the Kingdom. The Rabbis teach us that he is telling her that she can request anything other than asking that the Jewish Temple be rebuilt. Why of anything in the world is it this that's on his mind? And this is the same line he repeats the second time they meet. Why is the rebuilding of the Temple so bad?

Then suddenly when he discovers that Esther is a Jew, everything changes. His hatred becomes love to the point of no longer stating up to half the kingdom. He hands his ring and power to Mordechai. How does immense hatred suddenly disappear?

And one final question which was where we began this discussion last week. After the king learns that Mordechai was never rewarded for saving his life, and Haman suggests dressing the person the King wishes to honor in the king's coronation outfit and placing him on the King's horse, why does the King command Haman to do this for Mordechai the Jew. If the King hates the Jews, then why honor Mordechai, isn't there a better way to repay him if he feels he

must? Obviously Mordechai has no interest in this honor. How does dressing Mordechai up as a coronated king benefit Achashverosh?

Some years back, a very pregnant woman was cursed in the street by a crazy bum. He told her that her child would ride in a wheel chair. She was very spooked and the curse weighed on her mind. When the baby was born, I suggested that the mother take the newborn for a ride around the maternity ward in a wheelchair, thereby fulfilling and pushing aside the curse.

I believe that having heard Haman's suggestion, Achashverosh too wished to accomplish the same thing in advising Haman to do all he had suggested and commanding him to leave out nothing.

I believe based on a midrash sited in Talelei Orot that Achashverosh was told by astrologers that one day, he, a stable boy would become king. (He could have been the child of Cyrus and still a stable boy as Darius was only king for a few years and certainly had a life before coming to power.) But the astrologer also told him that he would be succeeded by a Jew on the throne.

Think about it and try to imagine from Achashverosh's point of view. The only conceivable was a Jew could take over is if they returned to their land, rebuilt their Temple and conquered the world which the Persians ruled. If they couldn't rebuild the Temple, then they would never regain the strength both spiritual and physical. Haman's suggestion was as the Rabbis suggest. One had a pit and the other a mound of dirt defining their hatred. Together they solve both of their problems through the extermination of the Jewish people. Even setting Mordechai in the royal clothes upon the royal horse was another attempt to fulfill the [prophecy and thereby put an end to it.

This is not to say that he had other paranoia. Esther's plan relied on Haman being a megalomaniac and Achashverosh being paranoid.

But something changes when Esther tells him that she is a Jew. It's at that point that he realizes that the prophecy was true all along. It did not need a rebellion to come true. As the Talmud tells us, he and Esther had a son and his name was Darius. And it was Darius, the son of a Jewish mother who eventually allowed and sponsored the rebuilding of the Temple.

Too many people seek to learn the future. And even if someone out there can tell it to us, it's impossible to truly understand. As Rabbi Abittan explained, in

hindsight the picture seems clear but had I listened to it earlier, it most likely would have messed me up as the words would have weighed on me and would have in reality misguided me. The Rabbi would often repeat, "Tamim Tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha, And you shall be pure before Hashem your G-d" He would quote the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 179:1 where Maran Bet Yosef states, "We do not ask astrologers or Goralot." And the Shach there who comments: The Terumat ha'Deshen says that doing an act of witchcraft, etc. is forbidden from the Torah, but asking is forbidden based on "Tamim Tihyeh."

Achashverosh teaches us an incredible lesson. Lets forget the fortune tellers, both holy and unholy. Let's forget the guys dressed in white sheets and the ladies reading coffee grinds. If we need something, we must remember, we have direct connect! "Tamim Tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha, And you shall be pure before Hashem your G-d"

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

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

2nd Aliya: The story of the Golden Calf is told. Moshe ascended Sinai on the morning of Sivan 7, and remained 40 days and nights. The 7th didn't start with a night, so it wasn't included in the total of 40. The Jews mistakenly assumed that it was to be included and expected Moshe back on the morning of Tamuz 16. Instead, he returned the morning of Tamuz 17. By midday of the 16th, the Jews were already desperate. Chur attempts to reason with them and is killed. They approach Aharon who attempts to redirect their terror which results in the Golden Calf. Moshe appears the next morning, breaks the Luchos, marshals the tribe of Levi, and 3000 people are killed. Moshe demands Hashem's forgiveness for the people, but moves the

Ohel Moed out from the midst of the camp. Yehoshua is proclaimed the main student of Moshe.

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

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

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

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

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

Aharon told the people who were requesting a substitute for Moshe to "go to the ladies and children and ask them for their gold jewelry." Aharon figured that they would resist giving it since jewelry is so precious to them, and by that time Moshe would return. What happened was totally unexpected! The ladies said, "We are not giving up our gold at all because we believe that Moshe is coming and we want no part of the golden calf." Indeed, that's why Rosh Hodesh, which should have been a full blown holiday for the Jewish people, if not for the golden calf, is still a minor holiday for the ladies.

We see that we should never underestimate anyone. Aharon thought the ladies would eventually give their gold because they would probably go along with the men. But in the long run they were the most loyal to Moshe and Hashem. There is a lot of greatness in people. We have to search for it and find it, and never sell anyone short, because if we have faith in people, they will live up to the greatness expected of them! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Sharp Object - One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda

Many parents have limited time available for bonding with their offspring, yet a good deal of that precious time is spent giving warnings.

"Don't climb up there! A person could slip and fall!" many a mother has admonished her little boy.

"Don't go near the stove! It is very hot!" others have cautioned.

"Here are the keys. Don't drive too fast!" parents regularly warn their children.

It wasn't too long ago that I heard a man ask his daughter to please bring him a knife with which to cut his fruit. As she returned, he said, "Don't carry a knife with the point facing away from you. You could inadvertently cut someone that way. Hold the knife with the sharp part facing down and with the blunt handle facing upward."

A bell went off in my head. "How careful one must be with something sharp. If that father is so worried about the sharp point of a knife, which can only cause physical harm, how careful must I be with my sharp tongue, which can cause emotional hurt to my victim and untold spiritual damage to me!"

The Torah warns us to be very aware of the feelings of others. Yes, we must be extra careful with the poor and with orphans and widows, yet we must also exercise intelligent restraint when dealing with even the toughest and strongest of our acquaintances. A wrong word – even uttered in innocence – may cause great emotional pain.

We all spend a good portion of our waking hours communicating with others. This gives us ample opportunities to practice thinking before speaking.

It only takes a moment of thought to consider the ripple effect of your words, before they leave your lips. It is a minute that may cancel the statement but save another the pain, and you the suffering, that hurtful words can cause.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Our Marriage to the Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Ki-Tisa reiterates the command to observe the Shabbat, emphasizing the unique severity of Shabbat desecration, which is considered a capital offense of the highest level and punishable by court execution.

Shabbat is the most frequent of all Jewish holidays. There is a Halachic principle known as "Tadir Ve'she'eno Tadir Tadir Kodem," which means that when we have two Misvot to perform at the same time, we first perform the more frequent Misva. This rule demonstrates that the importance of a more

frequent Misva exceeds that of a less frequent Misva. And the logic is clear: the Torah requires us to observe a law more frequently specifically because of its importance. Shabbat, then, is, without question, the most important of the Jewish holidays – even more important than Yom Kippur! – as evidenced by the fact that it is observed each and every week.

In fact, Shabbat is as important as our spouses. If we can consider for a few moments how important our spouses are to us, how vital a role they play in our lives and how much they mean to us, we can get a sense of the centrality of Shabbat observance in Jewish life.

The Zohar comments that at the time of creation, Shabbat, the seventh day, brought a complaint to God, so-to-speak. The other six days of the week each have a pair – Sunday and Monday form a pair, as do Tuesday and Wednesday, and Thursday and Friday. Shabbat is left as “the odd man out.” God responded to Shabbat’s complaint by explaining that Am Yisrael is its “pair.” We are “married” to Shabbat; our relationship to Shabbat is like that of a husband and wife.

This explains a number of intriguing passages in our liturgy and in the Talmud. For example, the Lecha Dodi hymn which we sing in the synagogue on Friday night describes Shabbat as a bride whom we go out to greet. The onset of Shabbat is the “wedding,” when we “marry” Shabbat, and we therefore wear our finest clothing and, with singing and festivity, go to greet and welcome the “bride.”

The Talmud, in Masechet Kiddushin, discusses the concept of “Shelihut” with regard to marriage, which means that a person can assign a Shaliah (messenger) to betroth a woman on his behalf. If a person assigns somebody else to give a girl in a different city an article of value for the purpose of betrothal, and she accepts it, they are betrothed – even if the bride and groom never met. However, the Gemara says, it is always preferable to perform a Misva – such as the Misva of marriage – personally, rather than through an agent. The Gemara gives as an example of this principle the stories of certain great Rabbis who made Shabbat preparations personally, rather than assigning this task to one of their many servants. Revealingly, the Gemara speaks of Shabbat preparations as an example relevant to the context of betrothal. Indeed, our preparation for Shabbat is like our engagement, when we are busy preparing for the great “wedding” between us and Shabbat.

This also explains why we sing “Eshet Hayil,” a chapter in Mishleh extolling the virtues of the “woman of valor,” on Friday night. On one level, of course, we sing this chapter to give praise and express our gratitude and admiration for the woman of the house who worked so hard to make a beautiful Shabbat. But in addition, this chapter is sung in honor of the “bride,” Shabbat, whom we “marry” on Friday night. For the same reason, the Talmud teaches that two angels escort a person home from the synagogue on Friday night. Kiddushin (betrothal) must be performed in the presence of two witnesses. As we “marry” Shabbat on Friday night, Hashem sends two angels to serve as witnesses to the act of “marriage.” And this may also be why we recite Kiddush. Just as the wedding ceremony begins with the recitation of a special Beracha over a cup of wine, we begin Shabbat, too, with this ritual, as Shabbat is also a marriage – a marriage between the Jewish people on Shabbat.

On Shabbat, it is customary to extend to one another the greeting of “Shabbat Shalom.” The foundation of marriage is “Shalom,” peace and harmony between husband and wife. Therefore, on Shabbat, we wish each other that our “marriage” to Shabbat should be peaceful and serene, just as we want our marriages to be.

What might we learn from this association between Shabbat and marriage?

In marriage, our spouse potentially serves as a source of great blessing, joy and gratification – but only if we ourselves are committed, loyal and devoted spouses. Marriage succeeds when it is a bilateral relationship of mutual sacrifice and unconditional giving. When we sacrifice for our spouses, we receive the great blessings and joy of marriage.

And this is precisely our relationship with Shabbat. In the Lecha Dodi hymn, we describe Shabbat as “Mekor Ha’beracha” – the source of blessing. Shabbat can be a source of blessing and prosperity, but only if we are a committed “spouse.” We must be loyal and devoted to Shabbat. If we spend the day sleeping, then we are not investing in the relationship. If we do not study and observe the laws and obligations of Shabbat, then we are not fulfilling our part of the relationship. Just as in marriage, the more we invest in the relationship, the more we will receive from the relationship. Let us, then, make a special effort each week to give Shabbat the attention, care and devotion it deserves, and we will then receive the incomparable blessings, joy and satisfaction that only Shabbat – and marriage – can provide.

Rabbi Wein WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

One of the great dangers in life, both national and personal, is looking backwards and dwelling upon what could have been, had we but chosen to behave and choose otherwise. There is much to be said for knowing history and appreciating the past. Yet the past, glorious and correct as we may wish to make it in our memory, is simply no longer here and many times it is no longer relevant to the issues and challenges that we currently face.

I have studied Jewish history, as well as world and American history for most of my life. The one lesson that I think that I have learned from all of these decades of study and reading is that there is much to be learned from the past but that the past is never the present.

The Jewish people have hallowed the concept of tradition and past custom, and in many sectors of the Jewish world the past is more important than the present. The Talmud even goes so far as to say that in certain instances custom can override halacha. Perhaps, as with no other people, the Jewish past holds us in its grip and in many respects prevents us from dealing successfully with the current problems and challenges that face us.

Not only do we treasure our past, but we willingly recreate it and falsify it to meet current political correctness and beliefs. Additionally we fantasize it in order to avoid dealing differently with the current troublesome present. The complete fictionalizing in much of the Jewish Orthodox world today, of nineteenth and twentieth century Eastern European Jewish life, has had dire consequences for us today. We deal in what could have been rather than in what actually was.

Part of the problem lies in our inability to admit that mistakes might have been made in the past. In our devotion to Torah and its scholars and leaders, we have built a wall of infallibility and a false portrayal of unanimity of our leaders about the issues and events of the past two centuries.

The traditional Jewish community that comprised most of eastern and central Europe began to dissolve and fracture in the 1800s. The false prophets of Marxism and of the Left seduced much of the Jewish youth of the time. Zionism arose as an antidote to Marxism and ironically as a movement that assimilated much of the ideas of the left into its nation building ideology.

There were many great rabbinic leaders who endorsed and joined the Zionist idea or at least the idea of the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. On the other hand, there were many rabbinic leaders who opposed Zionism in all of its forms and counseled strongly against leaving the "old home" of Eastern and Central Europe. The opposition to emigration was not only applied to moving to the Land of Israel but perhaps even more vehemently to leaving for America.

No one saw the Holocaust on the horizon and the resulting annihilation of European Jewry at that time but there is no question that our Jewish world would have looked quite different today had mass emigration of Jews from Europe occurred, leaving either to the Land of Israel or to North America. I am of course writing from perfect hindsight. But I do so because of the fact that the past has been so falsified and deified, that it has become a detriment instead of an asset to us in our current struggles for survival and growth.

One thing the past should have taught us is that politics and religious beliefs do not and perhaps should never mix or become identical. I cannot believe in my heart of hearts that voting for one political party over another is a fundamental matter of Jewish faith. The political battles of the religious and secular sections of the Jewish people, and perhaps even more so the bitter political battles between various factions of the religious community itself that we witness today, are little more than the continuity of those struggles that took place over the past two centuries in Europe.

And the irony is that none of the combatants in today's struggles seem to realize the déjà vu involved in their current political and ideological disputes. One would think that the Jewish left would have been cured of Marxism by the experience of the Soviet Union. One could also think that the events of the Holocaust and of the enormous success of the state of Israel would cause many in the religious world to rethink their view of the state and its place in Jewish life.

However, since many of us are always more concerned with what could have been than in what really was, this is pretty much a forlorn hope. Nevertheless, we should be wise and truthful about our past, practical about our present, and optimistic about our future.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Can there be Compassion without Justice?

At the height of the drama of the Golden Calf a vivid and enigmatic scene takes place. Moses has secured forgiveness for the people. But now, on Mount Sinai yet again, he does more. He asks God to be with the people. He asks Him to “teach me Your ways,” and “show me Your glory” (Ex. 33: 13, 18). God replies: “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence ... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But, He said, “you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live” (Ex. 33: 20).

God then places Moses in a cleft in the rock face, telling him he will be able to “see My back” but not His face, and Moses hears God say these words:

“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished ... (Ex. 34: 6-7?)

This passage became known as the “thirteen attributes of God’s compassion.”

The sages understood this episode as the moment in which God taught Moses, and through him future generations, how to pray when atoning for sin.[1] Moses himself used these words with slight variations during the next crisis, that of the spies. Eventually they became the basis of the special prayers known as selichot, prayers of penitence. It was as if God were binding himself to forgive the penitent in each generation by this self-definition.[2] God is compassionate and lives in love and forgiveness. This is an essential element of Jewish faith.

But there is a caveat. God adds: “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” There is a further clause about visiting the sins of the parents on the children which demands separate attention and is not our subject here. The caveat tells us that there is forgiveness but also punishment. There is compassion but also justice.

Why so? Why must there be justice as well as compassion, punishment as well as forgiveness? The sages said that “When God created the universe He did so under the attribute of justice, but then saw it could not survive. What did He do? He added compassion to justice and created the world.”[3] This statement prompts the same question. Why did God not abandon justice altogether? Why is forgiveness

alone not enough?

Some fascinating recent research in diverse fields from moral philosophy to evolutionary psychology, and from games theory to environmental ethics, provides us with an extraordinary and unexpected answer. The best point of entry is Garrett Harding’s famous paper written in 1968 about “the tragedy of the commons.”[4] He asks us to imagine an asset with no specific owner: pasture land that belongs to everyone (the commons), for example, or the sea and the fish it contains. The asset provides a livelihood to many people, the local farmers or fishermen. But eventually it attracts too many people. There is over-pasturing or overfishing, and the resource is depleted. The pasture is at risk of becoming wasteland. The fish are in danger of extinction.[5]

What then happens? The common good demands that everyone from here on must practice restraint. They must limit the number of animals they graze or the amount of fish they catch. But some individuals are tempted not to do so. They continue to over-pasture or overfish. The gain to them is great and the loss to others is small, since it is divided by many. Self-interest takes precedence over the common good, and if enough people do so the result is disaster.

This is the tragedy of the commons, and it explains how environmental catastrophes and other disasters occur. The problem is the free rider, the person who pursues his or her self interest without bearing their share of the cost of the common good. Because of the importance of this type of situation to many contemporary problems, they have been intensively studied by mathematical biologists like Anatol Rapoport and Martin Nowak and behavioural economists like Daniel Kahneman and the late Amos Tversky.[6]

One of the things they have done is to create experimental situations that simulate this sort of problem. Here is one example. Four players are each given \$8. They are told they can choose to invest as much or as little as they want in a common fund. The experimenter collects the contributions, adds them up, adds 50% (the gain the farmer or fisherman would have made by using the commons), and distributes the sum equally to all four players. So if each contributes the full \$8 to the fund, they each receive \$12 at the end. But if one player contributes nothing, the fund will total \$24, which with 50% added becomes \$36. Distributed equally it means that each will receive \$9. Three will thus have gained \$1, while the fourth, the free rider, will have gained \$9.

This, though, is not a stable situation. As the game is played repeatedly, the participants begin to realise there is a free rider among them even if the experiment is structured so that they don't know who it is. One of two things then tends to happen. Either everyone stops contributing to the fund (i.e. the common good) or they agree, if given the choice, to punish the free rider. Often people are keen to punish, even if it means that they will lose thereby, a phenomenon sometimes called "altruistic punishment."

Some have linked participants to MRI machines to see which parts of the brain are activated by such games. Interestingly, altruistic punishment is linked to pleasure centres in the brain. As Kahneman puts it, "It appears that maintaining the social order and the rules of fairness in this fashion is its own reward. Altruistic punishment could well be the glue that holds societies together." [7] This, though, is hardly a happy situation. Punishment is bad news for everyone. The offender suffers, but so do the punishers, who have to spend time or money they might otherwise use in improving the collective outcome. And in cross-cultural studies, it turns out to be people from countries where there is widespread free-riding who punish most severely. People are most punitive in societies where there is the most corruption and the least public-spiritedness. Punishment, in other words, is the solution of last resort.

This brings us to religion. A whole series of experiments has shed light on the role of religious practice in such circumstances. Tests have been carried out in which participants have the opportunity to cheat and gain by so doing. If, without any connection being made to the experiment at hand, participants have been primed to think religious thoughts – by being shown words relating to God, for example, or being reminded of the Ten Commandments – they cheat significantly less. [8] What is particularly fascinating about such tests is that outcomes show no relationship to the underlying beliefs of the participants. What makes the difference is not believing in God, but rather being reminded of God before the test. This may well be why daily prayer and other regular rituals are so important. What affects us at moments of temptation is not so much background belief but the act of bringing that belief into awareness.

Of much greater significance have been the experiments designed to test the impact of different ways of thinking about God. Do we think primarily in terms of Divine forgiveness, or of Divine justice and punishment? Some strands within the great faiths emphasize one, others the other. There are hellfire

preachers and those who speak in the still, small voice of love. Which is the more effective?

Needless to say, when the experimental subjects are atheists or agnostics, there is no difference. They are not affected either way. Among believers, though, the difference is significant. Those who believe in a punitive God cheat and steal less than those who believe in a forgiving God. Experiments were then performed to see how believers relate to free-riders in common-good situations like those described above. Were they willing to forgive, or did they punish the free-riders even at a cost to themselves. Here the results were revelatory. People who believe in a punitive God, punish people less than those who believe in a forgiving God. [9] Those who believe that, as the Torah says, God "does not leave the guilty unpunished," are more willing to leave punishment to God. Those who focus on Divine forgiveness are more likely to practice human retribution or revenge.

The same applies to societies as a whole. Here the experimenters used terms not entirely germane to Judaism: they compared countries in terms of percentages of the population who believed in heaven and hell. "Nations with the highest levels of belief in hell and the lowest levels of belief in heaven had the lowest crime rates. In contrast, nations that privileged heaven over hell were champions of crime. These patterns persisted across nearly all major religious faiths, including various Christian, Hindu and syncretic religions that are a blend of several belief systems." [10]

This was so surprising a finding that people asked: in that case, why are there religions that de-emphasize Divine punishment? Azim Shariff offered the following explanation: "Because though Hell might be better at getting people to be good, Heaven is much better at making them feel good." So, if a religion is intent on making converts, "it's much easier to sell a religion that promises a divine paradise than one that threatens believers with fire and brimstone." [11]

It is now clear why, at the very moment He is declaring his compassion, grace and forgiveness, God insists that He does not leave the guilty unpunished. A world without Divine justice would be one where there is more resentment, punishment and crime, and less public-spiritedness and forgiveness, even among religious believers. The more we believe that God punishes the guilty, the more forgiving we become. The less we believe that God punishes the guilty, the more resentful and punitive we become. This is a totally counterintuitive truth, yet one that finally allows us to see the profound wisdom of the Torah in helping us create a humane and compassionate society.

[1] Rosh Hashanah 17b.

[2] The Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 17b says that God made a covenant on the basis of these words, binding himself to forgive those who, in penitence, appealed to these attributes. Hence their centrality in the prayers leading up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and on Yom Kippur itself.

[3] See Rashi to Genesis 1:1.

[4] Garrett Harding, "The tragedy of the commons," Science 13 December 1968: Vol. 162 no. 3859 pp. 1243-1248.

[5] Long before Garrett Harding there was an old Hassidic story about the village where the people decided each to donate an amount of wine to fill a vat to present to the King on his forthcoming visit to the village. Secretly at night over the next few weeks each of the villagers took some wine, arguing to themselves that such a small amount would not be noticed. Each added an equal amount of water to the vat so that it stayed full. The king arrived, the villagers presented him with the vat, he drank from it and said, "It's just plain water." I guess many folk traditions have similar stories. This is, in essence, the tragedy of the commons.

[6] See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic, 1984. Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*, Penguin, 1996. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Allen Lane, 2011. Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, *Super Cooperators: Evolution, Altruism and Human Behaviour or Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011.

[7] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 308.

[8] Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*, Princeton University Press, 2013, 34-35.

[9] *Ibid.*, 44-47. [10] *Ibid.*, 46. [11] *Ibid.*

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL What do you gain from anti-Semites?

[Hashem] wants to teach us "Shebichol dor vador... — In every generation [the nations rise up against us.]" (Hagada)

You'll see someday in Washington — in the White House — a very big anti-Semite. I'm telling you, you'll see it. It'll be a great blessing for us. Then, maybe, at least Orthodox Jews will start coming together, crying out to Hashem for help. — Lessons of Purim (#731)

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