

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BEHAR

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 32:6-27
MAY 27-28, 2016 20 IYAR 5776

Day 35 of the Omer

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Yosef ben Esther

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 4:00PM – 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!

Editors Notes

Difficulties, Faith and the Mountain – Behar

We all face difficulties. In fact we always face difficulties. Is there anyone out there in cyberspace reading this who can claim they have not a single difficulty in their lives? I doubt it.

This morning I received an email from someone overseas which was the exact opposite of what we expected to hear. After being assured over the past two months not to worry, a possibly insurmountable problem was dumped into our laps. It was one of those, "Sorry, I know I promised and kept promising and although I could have told you two months ago when there were many options, now that it's too late, I admit I lied and there is nothing I can do."

I am sure we've all had those as well. And as I pondered the situation, I realized that any solution I could imagine at this point would not solve the problem. Any solution I could imagine would be a combination of very costly band aids. In the end no one would be happy, everyone would be pressed and we would be left bearing the cost and the blame."

But at that moment I smiled and recalled our class yesterday morning where we were discussing the opening words of the portion we read: Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai..."the land shall rest... it will be a Shabbat for Hashem"

Someone raised the question which I pointed out that Rashi asks: Why is it necessary for the Torah which is sparing with words to mention that the misva of shemita, the sabbatical year, was taught at Har Sinai? Weren't all the misvot given there?

Rashi answers that the Rabbis derive from here that not only were the general principles of all the misvot taught at Sinai, but, all of their fine details were given then.

But a question remains, why of all the misvot in the Torah was shemita singled out? How does the misvah of shemita relate to Sinai?

It is important to remember that our fathers and mothers, our ancestors, the parents of our parents (and our very own souls) stood at Mount Sinai and heard Hashem speak experiencing national revelation. Sometimes we forget and imagine that Hashem spoke only to Moses, but the Torah tells us again and again that Hashem appeared and spoke to everyone, some 3 million people.

Maimonides writes in the Mishna Torah: "What then were the grounds of believing Him? The revelation on Sinai which we saw with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, not having to depend on the testimony of others..."

We read three times in Devarim, in Moses final speech to the people:

'Hashem spoke to you from the midst of the fire, you were hearing the sound of words, but you were not seeing a form, only a sound. He told you of His covenant, instructing you to keep the Ten Commandments, and He inscribed them on two stone tablets.'

'You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is the Supreme Being. There is none besides Him. From heaven he let you hear His voice in order to teach you, and on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words amid the fire.'

Moses called all of Israel and said to them: ' Hashem your G-d sealed a covenant with us at Horev [Mount Sinai]. Not with our forefathers did Hashem seal this covenant, but with us — we who are here, all of us alive today. Face to face did Hashem speak with you on the mountain from amid the fire.'

Rabbi Nechemia Coopersmith writes: "Throughout history, tens of thousands of religions have been started by individuals, attempting to convince people that God spoke to him or her. All religions that base themselves on some type of revelation share essentially the same beginning: a holy person goes into solitude, comes back to his people, and announces that he has experienced a personal revelation where God appointed him to be His

prophet... Judaism is the only religion in the annals of history that makes the best of all claims — that everyone heard God speak. No other religion claims the experience of national revelation... (Because) ... A national revelation — as opposed to personal revelation — is the one lie you *cannot* get away with. It is one event you cannot fabricate. The only way to make this claim is if it actually happened."

Sinai is the basis of our faith in Hashem.

And nothing tests our faith as much as the Sabbatical year where Hashem commanded us to let our fields lie fallow every seventh year. I suggested that conceptually one might imagine nothing more difficult than the act of sacrificing a child, but as we see in our crazy world that act often comes in a moment of religious fervor and after the act delusion. But for a farmer to give up his livelihood and land for an entire year is a tremendous leap of faith. Its not just a moments act. How will he support his family? Day after day, month after month the farmer must look Heavenward for his sustenance. And in reality it's not just one year, it's more like two and at the Yovel, its three. This is a life where we completely submit to our trust in the Almighty.

Conceptually, the Sabbatical year is a powerful reminder that Hashem created this world from nothing in six days and rested on the seventh. Just as creation is an act of Hashem so is everything. Working the field day after day, one may begin to put faith in his own hands, in his irrigation system, in the seeds, in the fertilizer, in the magic of nature and forget G-d. But then we are asked to be reminded in the most powerful of ways by abstaining from farming activities and relinquishing possession of the land to the Creator for a full year.

"What will I eat"? Don't worry !

I have heard it said that this is the aim of shemita. Through the Sabbatical year we hope to achieve the level of faith and trust that we reached at Har Sinai.

Still where does one get the super human strength to live these laws? Perhaps it is because our ancestors and our souls first experienced that belief when we stood at Sinai. Perhaps it is this that enables a farmer despite all the challenges and hardships, to properly observe shemita every seventh year. We know that Hashem spoke to us and has a direct relationship with us. We remember hearing, "I am Hashem your G-d."

For the rest of us, the rabbi would teach us that the basis and starting point of faith and trust is the realization that all life only exist because and as

Hashem wills it to, that every single and miniscule event in our lives are directly from Hashem and he is playing an active role in each of us individually.

We started with the fact that we each have difficulties, some seemingly impossible to overcome. What do we do? I believe that sometimes, some of those difficulties simply come to us to remind that it's not "my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me". Sometimes it's to remind us of our dependence upon Hashem. Sometimes there are events beyond our human power to control. Perhaps these events are coming as a direct and personalized message from Hashem.

Perhaps he is telling us, just as the farmer must reach back to Sinai, so must we. Just as the farmer must remember the words of Moses, so must we. And just as the farmer must have faith, so must we.

And that's the plan!

Shabbat Shalom,

Summary of the Perasha

Behar - Holiness regarding land (shmita and yovel)

- 1- The issur of working the land on the years of shmita and yovel
- 2- Honesty in business, buying and selling land in regards to yovel, don't harass your fellow
- 3- The reward for keeping shmita, the issur of selling land permanently
- 4- Buying back the land of a relative who sold due to poverty
- 5- Buying back land. Preventing poverty by lending one who needs help. The obligation to lend w/o interest.
- 6- Laws regarding one who owns a Jewish slave or a non-Jewish slave
- 7- A Jew who sells himself to a non-Jew. The obligation to redeem him

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER "You shall provide redemption for the land." (Vayikra 25:24)

Our perashah focuses on the misvah of shemita and yobel. Every seventh year, the land is rested from plowing and planting. On every fiftieth year all the lands that were sold were redeemed, and returned to their original owners. There is an amazing true story told that involved the Baba Sali zt"l, and Rabbi Obadiah Yosef zt"l. The subject is Geulah, or redemption.

The year was 1972 and Rabbi Obadiah Yosef came to the town of Netivot to deliver a lecture to members of the Kollel there. He was accompanied

by his son, Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef (the current chief Rabbi of Israel). After the class, Rabbi Obadiah suggested to his son that they should visit the Baba Sali.

When the Baba Sali heard that Rabbi Obadiah was coming to visit him, he greeted him with great honor. However, the Baba Sali asked that all of the people that came should leave the room; he wanted to be alone with Rav Obadiah. All the people left, but Rabbi Yitzhak stayed by his father's side. When the Baba Sali saw this, he asked him to leave. When the Baba Sali was told that he was Rav Obadiah's son, he agreed that he should stay. So therefore, Rabbi Yitzhak was there to describe this incredible meeting.

The Baba Sali began by praising Harav Obadiah, and said how happy he was to see him. He related to him that even while he still lived in Morocco he heard about his greatness, and that was confirmed when he read his famous books called Yabia Omer. He continued that he didn't have the merit to meet Rav Obadiah face to face until now. Now that he has come, they should have a meal together in his honor, and during this meal the Geulah (Mashiah) will come!

Amazingly, Rav Obadiah responded and apologized to the Baba Sali that he was in a hurry to get to Bnei Brak to give a class there. He explained that he gives this class every Tuesday. The Baba Sali said, "I, and the great Rabbi, can now bring the Mashiah. This is more important than the class!"

Rav Obadiah responded, "The Gemara says (Megillah 16b) that learning Torah is greater than building the Bet Hamikdash, which implies that one must not push off a class of Torah for any reason!"

Think about that the next time you consider missing your class. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"If you will say 'What will we eat in the seventh year?'" (Vayikra 25:20)

The Torah commands the Jewish people to keep the laws of shemitah (sabbatical) and to refrain from planting or harvesting during the seventh year. Hashem promised that if they kept the laws properly, they would be blessed with an abundance of crops during the sixth year which would provide for them until the next planting.

The question is, if so, why will the Jews ask "what will we eat on the seventh year" if they already saw the blessing during the sixth year?

One of the commentaries answers that this question will be posed before the sixth year, even during the times of plenty, because it is not really a logical question, but rather, it reflects anxiety and worry by the Jewish people. It is possible for many of us to have abundance for the present and lack nothing, and still we will worry about the future to the

extent that we don't even enjoy what we really have. It is OK to prepare for the unknown but we should differentiate between logical concern and irrational worry and anxiety.

The way to overcome these kinds of feelings is through faith and trust in G-d, which the misvah of shemitah helped to instill in the Jews. There are many other commandments which also teach us this very important lesson of faith, such as closing our businesses for Shabbat and holidays, and the monetary laws which demand that we act in a very scrupulous manner. One who tries to strengthen his faith in Hashem will not only have peace of mind about the future, but will enjoy the present as well. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Helping By Not Helping

"And you shall not gather up the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the convert you shall leave them." (Vayikra 23:22)

This verse concerns the laws of Pe'ah and Leket – the obligation to leave certain parts of one's field and crop for the poor to come and collect freely. Rashi notes that the words "you shall leave them" are written to instruct the landowner not to assist the receiver of the crop in any way; rather, the poor person must collect everything by himself.

This instruction is difficult to understand. If the Torah is commanding the field owner to help the poor people of his town by leaving his gleanings, why is he prohibited from going further in his act of kindness and helping them in every way possible?

The answer is that by allowing the poor person to gather the gleanings by himself, he will feel less degraded than by being handed pure "charity." Moreover, the effort he exerted in picking the crops himself will lessen any feelings of humiliation at receiving a free hand-out.

This message was experienced very recently when a Swiss philanthropist donated new suits, shoes, shirts, and ties to young married men in Jerusalem. The value of the entire set should have cost more than one thousand shekels, yet the price was set at twenty shekels for the entire outfit. When asked, "For the sake of twenty shekels, why don't you just give it away for free?" the donor simply replied, "But then they will feel like they are receiving charity."

We see from here that even though we may not be in a position to leave a field for the poor, we can certainly apply this halachah to our own lives by helping others to help themselves. (Short Vort)

"Rabbi Ya'akov said, 'This world is like an antechamber before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the antechamber so that you may enter the banquet hall.'" (Abot 4:16)

Since Rabbi Ya'akob's message, seemingly, is simply that one should prepare himself in this world for the World to Come, what is added by the analogy?

Rabbi Ya'akob knew very well that if he were just to say, "Prepare yourself in this world so that you may enter the World to Come," one would procrastinate and say, "What is the rush? I have yet many years to live. Let me enjoy life, and when I get older, I will start my preparations."

The analogy discourages this attitude. When one is waiting to have an audience with the king, he waits first in the anteroom until he has been called. Now, though the amount of time he may have to wait outside is unpredictable, nevertheless, he has to be there before the time when his audience is scheduled and be groomed properly and fully prepared to enter the moment he is called. It would be absurd of someone to bring a suitcase containing his clothing and toiletries, thinking that since he may have to wait, he will use the anteroom to prepare himself. It is possible that suddenly the king may be ready to receive him, and he will lose his appointment because he is not ready. The only things one does in the anteroom are such things as looking into a mirror and making sure that everything is adjusted properly.

Therefore Rabbi Ya'akob begins by explaining that this world is the anteroom before the palace. Man in this world is waiting in the anteroom to be called for his audience. No one knows how soon or postponed it may be. Thus, to push off preparation is ludicrous. We must live a life of preparedness and continuously "hatken" – check if all is in proper order. (Vedibarta Bam)

Healing Old Wounds

The uncle of a young man about to be married arrived from out of town to share in his nephew's festivities. He drove to the home of the bride, where the reception was to be held. He rang the bell, which was promptly answered by the bride's father. The two sat down and talked about their individual backgrounds, yeshivah life, going back as far as elementary school. Apparently, the uncle and the kallah's father had been students in the same yeshivah during the same era. They began to share experiences, reminiscing about their time together in the yeshivah.

During the course of the conversation, the uncle reminded himself of an incident that had occurred during this period in the yeshivah. "I remember one night," the uncle began, "you were in

your dormitory room, and the other students wanted to have some 'fun' at your expense. They locked you in from the outside, essentially trapping you in your room. You banged on the door and pleaded to be released, but no one seemed to hear your pleas. Do you remember that incident?"

Being reminded of the incident cast a pall over the bride's father's face: "Of course, I remember that night. I have harbored the pain and humiliation within me throughout the years. Indeed, I said then – and I reiterate now – that I would never forgive the person who was responsible for that debacle!"

When the uncle who had related the story heard the father's reaction, he almost passed out. He was traumatized by this statement of contempt for the one who had locked the door, since it was he who had been the culprit who had committed the dastardly act against the kallah's father. Now what?

The next morning, the uncle presented himself at the office of one of the distinguished poskim, Halachic arbiters, to seek some form of resolution to this issue. The Rav suggested that he approach the bride's father, tell him the truth and beg his forgiveness. Otherwise, it would put a strain on the relationship between the two families.

The uncle listened to the Rav and proceeded to the kallah's house to reveal to her father that it had been he who had traumatized him years ago in the yeshivah. He now was asking his forgiveness. It was merely meant to be a prank. He had not intended to hurt, and certainly not to cause him distress for the rest of his life. Thirty years had elapsed since that fateful day, and much suffering had been generated by that act of teenage foolishness.

At first, the kallah's father hesitated. On the other hand, he could not look at the pleading man's face and turn him down. He acquiesced, absolving him on the condition that he would never hurt another person again. The uncle immediately accepted the resolution and promised to go out of his way to be sensitive to the feelings of others.

Postscript: One year following the incident, the uncle came knocking on the door of the bride's home for a third time. This time, he appeared with a shining countenance and an ear to ear smile. "I have come to inform you that my wife just gave birth to our first child – after twenty-six years!" One teenager's trauma and lack of forgiveness for his pain had resulted in the culprit's childlessness for twenty-six years. I write this story as a public service. (Peninim on the Torah)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
Sometimes, Less is More

Rashi's opening remarks to Parashat Behar are among the famous words in his Torah commentary: "Ma Inyan Shemita Esel Har Sinai" – "What does Shemita have to with Mount Sinai?" Rashi's question is why, when the Torah presents the Misva of Shemita – the "sabbatical" year – it emphasizes that God issued this command to Moshe at Mount Sinai. All Misvot of the Torah were taught to Moshe at Mount Sinai, and there thus seems no need for the Torah to inform us that God presented these laws of the seventh year at Sinai.

The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) suggests answering this question by noting the symbolic significance of Mount Sinai as the chosen site of Matan Torah. There are many tall, majestic mountains in Eretz Yisrael and its surrounding regions. Mount Hermon, in Northern Israel, is the tallest mountain in the country and nowadays is home to a popular ski resort in the winter. Mount Carmel, near the port city of Haifa, is another spectacular mountain. Mount Sinai, by contrast, as the Rabbis teach us, is unimpressive. It is not particularly tall or especially beautiful. In choosing a site for the momentous, once-in-history occasion of Matan Torah, for the most significant event in human history, God snubbed the majestic, verdant mountain ranges of Israel and preferred a small, humble, unassuming peak in the arid Sinai Peninsula.

The selection of Mount Sinai, the Ben Ish Hai observed, indicates that sometimes, "less is more." Very often, it is the small, outwardly unimpressive person who achieves great success. A struggling, humble business can somehow emerge as a booming enterprise. Little things can sometimes produce big results.

And this is one of the crucial messages of the Shemita laws. God instructs Beneh Yisrael – who, in ancient times, lived in a primarily agrarian society – to abstain from all agricultural work for an entire year, every seven years. Moreover, any produce that grew in the field was to be left ownerless, free for anyone who wished to take it. This would be comparable to a storeowner suspending all operations for an entire year, during which time the door is left open for anyone who wishes to help himself to merchandise.

How would the people survive? What would the farmer eat in the year after the Shemita year, when

all his produce is gone and he must begin his entire agricultural operation anew?

God assures Beneh Yisrael that they would be provided for. He promises that if they faithfully observe the Shemita laws, He would bless the produce of the sixth year, such that it would last them until the new crops planted after Shemita were ready.

This does not necessarily mean that the ground would produce more during the sixth year. Rather, it means that the food that is produced would last longer. Wealth is not only about quantity; it also entails quality. Sometimes a person makes a lot of money, but it does not last. To take a simple example, two friends walk into a pizza store, and each buys a piece of pizza. The first eats his pizza and feels satisfied; he will not need any more food until dinner that evening. The second, however, still feels hungry, and needs to buy another two slices. We have all had experiences where we see large sums of money consumed very quickly, and other times when a small sum manages to last us for a while. The reward for Shemita is that the limited supply of produce would last for a long time, that the nation will seem to have less, but in reality, it will have more.

This explains the connection to Mount Sinai. Just as a small mountain can rise to the greatest stature, similarly, a small amount of assets can sometimes serve its owner even better than a large fortune.

The Misva of Shemita reminds us that we must have faith in God's ability to provide for us. It teaches that we do not have to constantly fret over our money, always working to earn more. We must trust that God can send His blessing in whatever small amounts we have, and ensure that all our needs are cared for even with limited quantities of "produce."

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
NORMALCY

One of the most difficult standards to judge or even define is what is considered normal behavior. We all aspire to a sense of normalcy and in fact we wish to live in a society that is considered normal. The problem is how do we judge normalcy?

What was abnormal or even abhorrent behavior just a few decades ago is today within the realm of acceptability. So, there is no doubt that any definition of normalcy is relative to the society and times in which we live and function. However, Judaism does establish parameters for acceptable behavior. These are encompassed in the traditions, customs and values that the Torah presents before us.

What is normal and what can be considered deviant is rendered to us in absolute terms and not necessarily subject to relative interpretation. This idea of absolute values and of a standard of normalcy is itself considered to be abnormal in our current Western society. All lines of difference and behavior have been erased. Because of this we are inundated with all sorts of physical, moral, sexual, monetary and political scandals.

But, a scandal is a scandal only if there is a baseline of normalcy by which it can be judged. If there is no such measure of comparison, then how can there be any type of behavior that can be called scandalous? This dilemma lies at the heart of much of the confusion that exists throughout the Western world today. We all want to do what is correct but we no longer have any clear idea of what is right and wrong.

In the book of Judges we are told that there was a period of time in Jewish society – a very considerable period of time – when there were no standards of normalcy present. Every person did whatever was right “in their eyes.” A society that has no standards is doomed to chaotic splintering and manifold problems and disasters.

The idea that humans are entitled to inalienable rights such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is the basic credo of all modern Western democratic societies. However, Thomas Jefferson, when he wrote those words, never dreamt how far the doctrine of “inalienable rights” would be extended. Certainly he could not recognize the standards of normalcy and abnormality of his time as compared to those standards in today’s society.

This is not necessarily a negative thing because we are always looking for improvement that will benefit the larger society. However, the very loose definition of normalcy that exists today is linked, ironically, to many difficulties and unforeseen problems in the general society and in the Jewish world as well. Much of the tension and even violent struggles that exist in today’s world revolve about determining what is the basic understanding of normalcy. It is a problem that affects all faiths and all levels of society. And there is no general agreement as to what the benchmark

should be and therefore every group attempts to inflict its definition upon everyone else.

In the Jewish society as well, normative traditional behavior and standards have undergone great changes over the past decades. What was acceptable and normal Jewish behavior for centuries is no longer allowed. In certain areas of Jewish life, the rulebook itself has been rewritten, with previous opinions and scholarly debate expunged and new ideas presented. This rarely resembles what the old Jewish normalcy looked like.

Now, times change, circumstances change, different challenges arise and new dangers appear on the horizon. The previous world of Eastern European Jewry cannot be created again. Therefore, the standards that prevailed in that place and at that time are really no longer applicable to our situation.

We have adapted to our new circumstances and created new standards and definitions in Jewish religious life. All of that is valid. But what is invalid is that somehow we have rewritten the past in order to make it fit our current normalcy.

Doing so is dishonest and dangerous for it creates a world that never existed and gives false answers to the problems of previous generations. It excuses their failures and prevents a clear assessment of our current challenges. Only an honest appraisal of the past and of its standards, can create the inner strength to deal with our problems and the necessary behavior for progress and accomplishment

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Family Feeling

I argued in *Covenant and Conversation* Kedoshim that Judaism is more than an ethnicity. It is a call to holiness. In one sense, however, there is an important ethnic dimension to Judaism.

It is best captured in the 1980s joke about an advertising campaign in New York. Throughout the city there were giant posters with the slogan, “You have a friend in the Chase Manhattan Bank.”

Underneath one, an Israeli had scribbled the words, “But in Bank Leumi you have mishpochah.” Jews are, and are conscious of being, a single extended family. This is particularly evident in this week’s parsha. Repeatedly we read of social legislation couched in the language of family:

When you buy or sell to your neighbour, let no one wrong his brother. (Lev. 25:14)

If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his property, his near redeemer is to come to you and redeem what his brother sold. (25:25)

If your brother is impoverished and indebted to you, you must support him; he must live with you like a foreign resident. Do not take interest or profit from him, but fear your God and let your brother live with you. (25:35-36)

If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you, do not work him like a slave. (25: 39)

"Your brother" in these verses is not meant literally. At times it means "your relative", but mostly it means "your fellow Jew". This is a distinctive way of thinking about society and our obligations to others. Jews are not just citizens of the same nation or adherents of the same faith. We are members of the same extended family. We are – biologically or electively – children of Abraham and Sarah. For the most part, we share the same history. On the festivals we relive the same memories. We were forged in the same crucible of suffering. We are more than friends. We are mishpochah, family.

The concept of family is absolutely fundamental to Judaism. Consider the book of Genesis, the Torah's starting-point. It is not primarily about theology, doctrine, dogma. It is not a polemic against idolatry. It is about families: husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

At key moments in the Torah, God himself defines his relationship with the Israelites in terms of family. He tells Moses to say to Pharaoh in his name: "My child, my firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4:22). When Moses wants to explain to the Israelites why they have a duty to be holy he says, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). If God is our parent, then we are all brothers and sisters. We are related by bonds that go to the very heart of who we are.

The prophets continued the metaphor. There is a lovely passage in Hosea in which the prophet describes God as a parent teaching a young child how to take its first faltering steps: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son ... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms ... To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them." (Hosea 11:1-4).

The same image is continued in rabbinic Judaism. In one of the most famous phrases of prayer, Rabbi Akiva used the words Avinu Malkenu, "Our Father, our King". That is a precise and deliberate expression. God is indeed our sovereign, our lawgiver and our judge, but before He is any of these things He is our parent and we are His children. That is why we believe divine compassion will always override strict justice.

This concept of Jews as an extended family is powerfully expressed in Maimonides' Laws of Charity:

The entire Jewish people and all those who attach themselves to them are like brothers, as

[Deuteronomy 14:1] states: "You are children of the Lord your God." And if a brother will not show mercy to a brother, who will show mercy to them? To whom do the poor of Israel lift up their eyes? To the gentiles who hate them and pursue them? Their eyes are turned to their brethren alone.[1]

This sense of kinship, fraternity and the family bond, is at the heart of the idea of Kol Yisrael arevin zeh bazeh, "All Jews are responsible for one another." Or as Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai put it, "When one Jew is injured, all Jews feel the pain." [2]

Why is Judaism built on this model of the family? Partly to tell us that God did not choose an elite of the righteous or a sect of the likeminded. He chose a family – Abraham and Sarah's descendants -- extended through time. The family is the most powerful vehicle of continuity, and the kinds of changes Jews were expected to make to the world could not be achieved in a single generation. Hence the importance of the family as a place of education ("You shall teach these things repeatedly to your children ...") and of handing the story on, especially on Pesach through the Seder service.

Another reason is that family feeling is the most primal and powerful moral bond. The scientist J. B. S. Haldane famously said, when asked whether he would jump into a river and risk his life to save his drowning brother, "No, but I would do so to save two brothers or eight cousins." The point he was making was that we share 50 per cent of our genes with our siblings, and an eighth with our cousins. Taking a risk to save them is a way of ensuring that our genes are passed on to the next generation. This principle, known as "kin selection", is the most basic form of human altruism. It is where the moral sense is born. That is a key insight, not only of biology but also of political theory. Edmund Burke famously said that "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind." [3] Likewise Alexis de Tocqueville said, "As long as family feeling was kept alive, the opponent of oppression was never alone." [4]

Strong families are essential to free societies. Where families are strong, a sense of altruism exists that can be extended outward, from family to friends to neighbours to community and from there to the nation as a whole.

It was the sense of family that kept Jews linked in a web of mutual obligation despite the fact that they were scattered across the world. Does it still exist? Sometimes the divisions in the Jewish world go so deep, and the insults hurled by one group against another are so brutal that one could almost be persuaded that it does not. In the 1950s Martin Buber

expressed the belief that the Jewish people in the traditional sense no longer existed. Knesset Yisrael, the covenantal people as a single entity before God, was no more. The divisions between Jews, religious and secular, orthodox and non-orthodox, Zionist and non-Zionist, had, he thought, fragmented the people beyond hope of repair.

Yet that conclusion is premature for precisely the reason that makes family so elemental a bond. Argue with your friend and tomorrow he may no longer be your friend, but argue with your brother and tomorrow he is still your brother. The book of Genesis is full of sibling rivalries but they do not all end the same way. The story of Cain and Abel ends with Abel dead. The story of Isaac and Ishmael ends with their standing together at Abraham's grave. The story of Esau and Jacob reaches a climax when, after a long separation, they meet, embrace and go their separate ways. The story of Joseph and his brothers begins with animosity but ends with forgiveness and reconciliation. Even the most dysfunctional families can eventually come together.

The Jewish people remains a family, often divided, always argumentative, but bound in a common bond of fate nonetheless. As our parsha reminds us, that person who has fallen is our brother or sister, and ours must be the hand that helps them rise again.

- [1] Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:2.
 [2] Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai to Ex. 19:6.
 [3] Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Reflections on the French Revolution. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14.
 [4] Democracy in America, Chapter XVII: Principal causes which tend to maintain the democratic republic in the United States

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL
 "Rabbi Yossi says: ...and let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven" (Abot 2:12)**

Rabbi Yossi was one of the five greatest disciples of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai. He was a Cohen and was noted to be a "Haseed", who served Hashem in an extraordinary manner in all aspects of service. The Mishna lists for us three cardinal paths which R' Yossi lived by. In the final one he teaches us that we can practice having all of our actions done 'In order to serve You Hashem', and thereby reach high levels of perfection, through mundane as well as spiritual actions.

Rambam z'l wrote that this principle, of making all your actions for the purpose of Heaven, is a "wondrous point". We can utilize this great principle in all facets of our lives and thereby elevate mundane activities

into the spiritual realm of holiness and serving Hashem.

Prior to eating, walking, exercising, getting dressed, showering, opening then door to your place of work etc. just say the words "I am doing this to serve You Hashem".

For example, "I am going to sleep tonight To serve You Hashem".

You have now elevated your sleep and transformed it into actually serving Hashem.

By making this "wondrous" practice a regular part of our everyday life it will bring us to Yirat Shamayim, Awareness of G-d, in all of our actions and it will transform the most physical and ordinary daily activities into acts of Serving Hashem.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (Mishle 3:4).

The Gaon of Vilna explains this as "Let all of your deeds be for the sake of Heaven".

This principle will also elevate our spiritual actions to a level closer to Hashem's will. When the women are cooking meals for their families or lighting candles...; When the men are putting on Tefillin; Even before a person is about to open a sefer to learn Torah; Say it, once a day: "I am doing this in order to be more aware of Hashem"

Make all your actions for the purpose of Heaven.

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Project Genesis, and refer to learn@torah.org and <http://www.torah.org/>. Both the authors and Project Genesis reserve certain rights. For full information on copyrights, send email to copyrights@torah.org.

Shabbat Shalom From Cyberspace E Mail Edition is published each week since 1995 and is distributed to 18,000 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 Send a request to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@Gmail.com with your name, phone, fax and E-Mail Address