

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

NASO

Haftarah: Shoftim 13:2-25

MAY 29-30, 2015 12 SIVAN 5775.

**SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SCHEDULE**

Friday, May 29nd

Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday nights and all evening services this weekend

Minha & Arbit 7:00 PM

Candle Lighting 7:59 PM

Shabbat Parashat Bemidbar, Saturday May 30th

Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM

Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30

The kiddush this Shabbat is being given by Dr and Mrs. Baruch Kahn
in memory of Baruch's father ,Schmuel Eliyahu ben.David Hacoheh zl.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

Seuda Shelishi at \$100 for the class each week. And Sunday and weekday breakfasts are \$100 ea

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 April and May at 5:00 PM

Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon: 6:55 - Minha 7:25 PM - Seudat Shelishit 7:55 PM

Birkat HaMazon 8:40PM Arbit 8:45 PM – Shabbat Ends at 8:59

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday followed by breakfast and class 8:00AM

Monday , Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM

Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:45 PM

LOOKING FORWARD:Danny and Rina Hirsch will be sponsoring next week's kiddush honor of Bobby and Hindy
as well as Tina and Uri for hosting Danny's family the week of their wedding.

Sisterhood Meeting...Sunday June 14th at 9:30 am

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
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**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!**

Editors Notes

There is something about a YEHI SHEM day that makes all of us who attend the daily services in the Synagogue very happy. What's a YEHI SHEM day? It's the days where we omit Tahanun which translates as "supplication". Tahanun represents the additional prayers including a vidui, (a confessional prayer), recited following the weekday Amidah at Shahrith and Mincha. On most days Tahanun is relatively short. On Mondays and Thursdays, we usually say an extended Tahanun which adds about six minutes to the prayers.

Could it be the fact that we save anywhere from three to six minutes and we are so happy? It's definitely much more. A Yehi Shem day is usually a day of joy and that joy must be catchy. The entire month of Nisan where Passover falls and we celebrate our freedom is a Yehi Shem month. The month of Tishrei beginning with Yom Kippur through Sukkot to the end of the month is a joyous Yehi Shem period. Likewise the first 13 days of this month of Sivan are Yehi Shem Days – (some hold only the first 12). The days preceding Shavuot are reminiscent of our preparation to receive the Torah – our wedding with the Divine. And then seven days from the Holiday act as a sort of addendum to the Holiday representing our Honeymoon with the Divine.

During the times of the Mikdash, those who were unable to bring their sacrifices on the day of Shavuot were allowed to do so during the additional six days following Shavuot. So this week really represents the eighth week following Passover. We know that in Judaism, the number eight always alludes to a departure from the "natural" world, and entry into the supernatural world. The brit Milah is on the 8th day when a child moves beyond the physical to the spiritual.

With that we were curious and discussed on Tuesday morning the portion we will read this Shabbat called Naso. Naso typically follows the holiday of Shavuot and as this is the honeymoon week, many call this Shabbat, the Shabbat of the bride or Shabbat Kallah. Naso is unique in that it contains the most verses of any portion of the Torah. Shavuot is the festival that

celebrates the giving of the Torah and perhaps in dividing the portions, the rabbis had us take upon ourselves this longest of sedras symbolic of our commitment and representative of our desire to have more Torah.

Exactly how many verses are there? Ask the Bar Mitzvah boy who is lucky enough to read this week. He will tell you that there are 176 verses. That number 176 representing the longest portion also represents some other longest portions in Torah learning. The second significance of this number is that the chapter in Tanach (Jewish Bible) with the most verses consists of 176 verses, which is in Tehillim (Psalms) - Chapter 119, and the longest tractate in the Talmud consists of 176 dapim or pages is Baba Batra.

We wondered what the significance of 176 is, so we went to our online Gematria or numerical value calculator. The word LeOlam – forever has the equivalent value of 176. So does LaKum to rise up. YoEtz – to give advice. Vayasilem – And he saved them is also 176. There are lots more including the phrase KeManhig Hagadol - the Great Ruler You can definitely make a speech out of one of those or any combination.

We were hoping for something more. And we kept coming back to that number eight signifying the supernatural. We recalled that much of this portion dealing with the sacrifices of each of the 12 princes is divided and read during the 8 days of Hanukah. The miraculous light of eight days represents going beyond nature. Well what if we divided the 176 by 8. We get 22 which represent the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the building blocks of creation. In fact the 176 verses of Chapter 119 of Psalms follow a pattern whereby the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used to begin 8 verses each. I was told that the Arizal suggests this.

Then we saw posted on Aish: 22 is a number of completeness, because it is the full representation of the 22 letters of the Alef-Bet - i.e. everything from A to Z (from Alef to Tav). As for the number 8: We know that 7 represents the "natural realm" - i.e. 7 days of the week, 7 notes in the musical scale, etc. But 8 represents completeness beyond nature - a completeness in the spiritual realm. That is why Brit Milah is held on the 8th day of a boy's life. This also explains why God first commanded Abraham to perform circumcision with the words, "Walk before Me and be complete" (Genesis 17:1).

The product of two "complete" numbers, "22-times-8," is therefore the ultimate completeness. That's why

176 is used to demonstrate the supernal perfection of our holy Torah. And maybe that's where LeOlam comes in because LeOlam translates as universe but also translates as hidden.

Working backwards, perhaps the Rabbis working with Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1523 realized that with commentaries Baba Batra would be the longest tractate and if so they should set the pages to complete it at 176 based on Psalm 119 and Naso. And perhaps Ezra when dividing the portions and settling on Naso as the longest also decided that 176 would be his number based on Psalm 119. And King David certainly realized the secret of the twenty two letters as Psalm 119 is divided into 22 parts representing each letter of the alphabet and each letter is repeated at the beginning of eight verses.

As we celebrate this eighth week, this Shabbat Kalah and honeymoon of Shavuot with our 176 verse portion, we should remember that it's up to us to seek advice YoEtz in the words of the Torah and our sages. And in that merit may we be blessed (remember we read birkat kohanim this week) LaKum to rise above our nature and be blessed from the Manhig HaGadol, the great ruler who will save us VaYasilem and bring Mashiah Bimherah BeYameynu Amen.

Now how did we get here from Yehi Shem?

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

PS ... Thanks to Rabbi Lookstein for reminding us:

We are proud to join OU Advocacy-Teach NYS and the UJA-Federation of New York to push New York state legislators to pass the Education Tax Credit bill before the end of the Legislative Session in mid-June.

This bill is very important to our local Yeshivot and Day Schools. Through the Education Tax Credit bill, our schools have the potential to receive significant funding.

We are committed as a school to help push for the Education Tax Credit bill. And this is where you - a member of the the community - can take action.

State legislators need to hear from you.

Here's what you can do to help:

1. Take 60 seconds to send a message to Governor Cuomo, your Assembly Member and your State Senator to urge them to pass the Education Tax Credit bill. [Click here to send your message.](#)
2. Be social! Share the action alert with your social networks, with your colleagues and members of your community.

It is crucial that each of us participate in this campaign to help pass education tax credits. If you're interested in additional ways to advocate for day schools and yeshivas, please contact NY@ouadvocacy.org.

PSS... The following was posted last week, but a number of people asked to repost it. The article was written by my sister in law Jill Harris for Tablet Magazine. Jill has written extensively for newspapers and magazines and has published books. She told me that researching this article was really a labor of love. Within it one finds Jewish ingenuity but also the miracle of hasgachat perati or Divine Providence and a reminder of the hatred of anti-Semites both then and today. Let me know your thoughts

**The Immeasurable Value of a Fake Diamond Ring
It's made of nickel and a piece of crystal. But it helped save Jews from the Nazis.
By Jill Werman Harris
TABLET MAGAZINE**

Inside a tiny box in a temperature-controlled, locked cabinet at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, there is a ring. It is not particularly beautiful, and in purely monetary terms, it is not particularly valuable. But behind this ring is a beautiful story of survival of Jews living under Nazi occupation—people for whom the ring's value proved incalculable.

When WWII broke out, Abraham "Bumek" Gruber was a cattle merchant and butcher in Drohobycz, a small town—now part of Ukraine, but then part of Poland—that was then home to some 14,000 Jews. The town, whose Jewish history dates back to at least the 15th century, fell under Soviet control in 1939. But two years later, the Nazis invaded; killing squads arrived, murdering 400 Jews on the streets in a pogrom. The rest of the Jews of Drohobycz were ultimately forced into a ghetto. While it was technically an open ghetto with no fences, Jews were not allowed to leave. May 21, 1943, marked the final liquidation of the ghetto; the Germans declared the town Judenrein, cleansed of Jews. But roughly 400 Jews hid in the forest or other hiding places and survived.

Bumek was one of them—thanks, in part, to the ring.

Handsome and likable, Bumek was known for his intelligence and resourcefulness. As a reservist in the Polish cavalry, he was called up for active duty in 1939. But when his unit soon disbanded because of the German advancement, he walked the 250 miles back to Drohobycz, his hometown. According to his nephew, Marcel Drimer, Bumek survived on his quick wit as he pretended to be Polish or Ukrainian, working for food and shelter along the way, in order to make it back home to his extended and close-knit family, which in part included his parents, his sister Laura, her husband Jakub, and their children Marcel and Irena.

Bumek also had his own daughter, Liba, with his wife, Blimka. After the German invasion, they first lived under Nazi occupation and were then forced to live in the ghetto, where food was scarce and Jews were frequently targeted by Nazi "aktions," where they were loaded onto freight trains bound for concentration or death camps. One day, during yet another brutal aktion—where Nazis would enter Jewish homes, sometimes looting or simply destroying anything belonging to Jews, before rounding them up for deportation—Bumek watched as German soldiers broke a chandelier. As the crystal pieces flew across the room and landed on the floor, Bumek had an idea. He gathered some of the broken pieces of the chandelier and asked a jeweler to make him a ring—a fake diamond ring, made out of nickel with a crystal cut like a diamond—just in case.

Bumek was considered lucky when, in 1943, he was moved from the ghetto to work as a butcher for the SS at the Galicia oil refinery camp, where he lived in a labor camp with Blimka and Liba. His sister Laura and her family were hiding in a nearby town, Mlynki Szkolnikowe, at the home of Jan and Zofia Sawinski—who had been friendly neighbors when Laura and Bumek were growing up—and their four children. Food was rationed but the Sawinskis' 12-year-old son, Tadek, would bring table scraps home for their livestock, secretly giving it to their guests, who included two other Jewish families—10 people in all—hidden in the attic under the thatched roof or in a small hole under the dirt floor. Marcel, who was 9 years old when he was in hiding at the Sawinskis' with his parents and 7-year-old sister Irena, told me: "Sometimes, Bumek secretly gave Tadek some meat or bread to bring to all of us, which was very dangerous."

One day when Bumek was at work, someone informed him that his wife and child had been put on a truck with other Jews and taken to the forest. Because Bumek had befriended some German

officers by giving them better cuts of meat, one of them took him by motorcycle to rescue Blimka and Liba; family members of "essential workers" like Bumek were considered protected. But as they approached the forest, Bumek saw only the empty truck. When he looked inside, there was the clothing of the dead, among which he found Liba's little shoes. His wife and daughter had been executed.

Bumek lost his will to live. But a few weeks later he saw a little 4-year-old girl, Fela, who was about the same age as his beloved Liba, playing alone on the ground in the labor camp. He took her by the hand and asked, "Where is your mother?" Fela brought him to her mother, Tusia Schindler, who was a seamstress working for the Nazis at the camp. He yelled at Tusia, imploring her, "Never let your child stay alone! They will take her and murder her!" Bumek and Tusia began to talk and exchanged their stories. Tusia's husband, Gedalko, had been mobilized by the Soviet army but she heard he was taken prisoner by the Germans. Because it was widely reported that the Germans immediately killed Jewish POW's, Tusia assumed he was dead. Both presumably widowed, Tusia and Bumek became very close.

At one point, one of the Nazi wives for whom Tusia was sewing dresses told Tusia in a demanding tone that she had to finish by a certain date. It was a clear sign that the next aktion was coming. The Nazi wife's reductionist logic was indescribably sickening: How would the dresses be made if the seamstress was to be liquidated?

Bumek knew he, Tusia, and Fela had to leave immediately.

At nighttime, Bumek brought Tusia and Fela to the Sawinskis' house in Mlynki Szkolnikowe. Jan Sawinski was expecting Bumek, but he was startled to see Tusia and refused to take an additional person; he didn't even know about little Fela, who was hidden in a wagon under a cover of hay. Bumek had already lost his wife and daughter. He was not going to allow something like that to happen again. It was at this critical point that Bumek said, "Listen, I have a diamond ring that I want to give you."

He pleaded with Jan, hoping he would take the ring in exchange for hiding them. But Jan wasn't convinced, saying only that he wanted to have something to eat and some vodka and that he would sleep on it.

The next morning Jan came to Bumek and said: "Last night I dreamed of Jesus Christ and he told me that I have to rescue you." Bumek was relieved and

introduced him to Fela. Sawinski laughed and said, "Whatever it is, I'm going to take care of you." Sawinski also mentioned that his cow just died. "So it's great that you gave me the ring," he told Bumek happily, "so I can sell it to buy a cow to feed you all!"

Bumek froze. He knew that if Jan tried to sell the ring, and it was discovered that the ring was made of nickel, the "stone" was made of glass, they might all be killed. Bumek just had to convince him not to sell it without letting him know it was a fake. Boldly he pleaded: "Please, you cannot sell it. This ring is an heirloom in my family for generations. Wait until after the war. I promise when the Russians come in—and they're not so far away—I will buy you the most beautiful new cow."

That winter, 13 Jews hid in the Sawinskis' safe house. The Soviet Army liberated the region on Aug. 7, 1944, and they were free. Bumek kept his word and bought Jan a beautiful cow, and Jan returned the ring to its clever owner.

Jan and Zofia Sawinski and their four children were all later honored by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations for saving 13 Jewish lives.

Bumek and Tusia married. When she was several months pregnant with Bumek's child, Tusia's first husband Gedalko came to find her. Bumek and Tusia were shocked to find he had survived; he had in fact been captured by the Italians, not the Germans, which explained why he had not been killed. According to Marcel, Tusia loved both men, but together they decided that Tusia would stay with Bumek. There was no animosity and they were able to remain friends. Bumek and Tusia lived in Poland until 1957 and eventually moved to Israel.

After Tusia died in 1967, Bumek later married his third wife, Mania, to whom the ring passed. Bumek died in the early 1990s, and when Mania died a few years ago, Irena contacted the family. "When you take Mania's jewelry to be appraised," she said, "the one item that is worth nothing is the one I want."

The phony ring that saved them was donated to the Holocaust Museum in 2013 by siblings Marcel Drimer and Irena Wysoki, who lives in Israel.

Marcel and Irena today.

Teresa A. Pollin, a Polish-born curator in the museum's arts and artifacts department, was instrumental in acquiring it. She has known Marcel and Irena for more than a decade. "I know how detail-oriented they are," Pollin told me, adding that "each

time I had questions about any part of the story, historians came to the rescue" and backed up the family's tale. "There is not a shred of doubt in my mind regarding the veracity of the story," she concluded.

"The ring is important," Pollin explained, "because it's a symbol of ingenuity and a deep understanding of the horrid fate prepared by Germans for the Jews."

Today Marcel is in his 80s and lives in Virginia. He and his wife Ania are long-standing volunteers at the museum, where Marcel lectures regularly on his life and survival in Drohobycz. He is still in touch with the grandchildren of the Sawinski family.

"The ring saved us all. It was one of the many miracles that helped us survive," said Marcel. The ring, he added, "helps all people understand how tenuous life and survival was at that time."

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading by NATHAN I DWECK

Naso - The Leviim are counted, Korbanot for hakamat mishkan (year 2)

- 1- The special responsibilities of benei Gershon and Merari. Benei Kehat are counted
- 2- Benei Gershon and Merari are counted
- 3- Rules regarding a tameh and where he must stay, one who steals and swears falsely
- 4- Sotah , nazir, birkat kohanim
- 5- Korbanot offered by the leaders of each tribe on the first days of mishkan (days 1-5)
- 6- Korbanot offered by the leaders of each tribe on the first days of mishkan (days 6-10)
- 7- Korbanot offered by the leaders of each tribe on the first days of mishkan (days 11-12)

JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"But if the woman had not forfeited her purity and is pure then she remains untouched and shall conceive seed." (Bemidbar 5:28)

In Parashat Naso we are taught a most encouraging lesson. The Torah tells us about a married woman who is suspected of being unfaithful. She is tested with a special drink prepared by the Kohen. If she was really unfaithful, she will die. If she was innocent she lives. However, not only does she live, but the Talmud (Berachot 31) says that one opinion says if she was unable to conceive and have children, now she will. Another opinion says that if

she had difficulty giving birth up until now, she will give birth easily. All agree that she will be blessed.

There is a great question here. Why is she blessed? This is a woman whom the Torah says was warned by her husband not to go into private seclusion with this man. She went so far as to rebel against her husband by going into seclusion. We know this is so, because if she didn't, she is not even tested with the waters. So why is she blessed?

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian says we have here a fundamental lesson. This woman was low enough that as a married woman she went so far as to go into seclusion despite being warned. It must be she had a great fire of desire burning in her! Why didn't she do the final sin? We must say that when it came to the moment of truth, she conquered her desire and "did not become impure" and "thv vruvy - she is pure!" What a great victory! She might be held accountable for disobeying her husband and must make teshubah. However, Hashem will reward her fully for her great act of self control. Hashem does not hold back reward for any good act we do, even if it is mixed in with something less than good. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"If a man's wife strays" (Bemidbar 5:12)

The word which is used to denote straying (vya,) is the same word which means "folly - vyua." Indeed, the Rabbis tell us that a person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters him first. This means that any rational and sane person would know not to commit a transgression. What happens to a person, however, is that momentarily he is overtaken by a desire or an impulse, and therefore does something wrong. This is akin to temporary insanity. Is it not insane that we argue with our spouses about foolish things, letting everything go to pieces because of a minor issue which is usually resolvable if we wouldn't stand on ceremony? What about words said in anger or spite? Is that not foolish? If we would go down the line, we would see that there is no logic to most of our transgressions!

This is the lesson of the wayward woman, the sotah. If we learn to be on the lookout for this "spirit of foolishness," we can nip it in the bud, and let our reason and common sense keep us in line. Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

THE MILKMAN'S FOCUS

There is a vast difference in the spiritual achievement resulting from a good deed that is done with intent to please Hashem, and one that is done without focusing intent Heavenward.

The difference is illustrated in the following parable:

There was a man who rose every day before dawn and went from house to house delivering bottles of milk. A resident of the town happened to wake up early one morning and saw him making his rounds. He noticed the efficient, systematic way in which the man dropped off the bottles at one house and rushed to the next, hardly talking time to breathe.

"What an act of hesed," he thought to himself, greatly impressed.

His view of the situation changed drastically when he learned that the man did not make these deliveries out of the goodness of his heart, but for profit. This was his job. He was the local milkman!

So it is with us. When our intentions are pure, our deeds become elevated. All that we do can be elevated in the spiritual realm if we would just focus on "good for good's sake."

Two Rabbis were walking in Jerusalem and saw a man fixing potholes. One turned to the other and commented, "This man could get the great misvah of yishub Eress Yisrael – settling and building the Land of Israel. All he has to do is think that this is his goal, and his menial job becomes an eternal misvah!"

Take a minute before you begin to do something – anything – and find a way to make your simple day-to-day routine Heaven-oriented. It only takes a minute, and the reward is immeasurable. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

**Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
Stealing From G-d**

We find in Parashat Naso a brief discussion concerning a thief who falsely denies his crime on oath. The Torah describes the process by which the thief atones for his sin, beginning with "Viduy" – verbal confession: "They shall confess their sin that they committed" (5:7).

The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, Spain-Egypt, 1135-1204), in the beginning of Hilchot Teshuba, cites this verse as the Biblical source of the Misva of Teshuba. When the Torah requires a thief to confess his wrongdoing and repent, it establishes the obligation for every sinner to undergo the process of repentance.

The question arises, why did the Torah choose specifically this context to introduce to the Misva of Teshuba? Why did it present this Misva amidst its discussion of a thief – a crime which few of us commit? Why did it not introduce the concept of Teshuba in the context of more common transgressions?

The Rebbe of Ger explained that in truth, every sinner is guilty of stealing – from God. Our bodies were given to us for the exclusive purpose of serving God – studying Torah and performing Mitzvos. Our eyes, ears, legs, hands, minds – everything we have has been given to us only for this reason. Misusing our bodies for wrongdoing is, essentially, stealing from God. It would be no different from borrowing a friend's car to go into the city, and then using it to climb a tall mountain on a dirt road. Using our fellow's property for a different purpose than for which it was lent is considered stealing. By the same token, using our bodies for sin constitutes theft. We were lent mouths and ears for prayer and Torah, not for gossip or telling lies. If we use them for these purposes, then we are guilty not only of Lashon Hara and falsehood, but also of theft, as we have misused the bodies that God has lent to us.

This is why the command of Teshuva appears in the context of theft – to teach us that sinning is stealing. We are not the owners over our bodies, over our lives. Our physical beings have been given to us on loan, for the expressed purpose of devoting them to matters of sanctity, to the service of our Creator. It is not within our right to use them in violation of God's commands. We must ensure to use our bodies – and, in fact, all our assets, all the blessings God has granted us – for Torah and Mitzvos, to grow spiritually and to contribute meaningfully to the world. We will then be fulfilling our duty as God's trusted servants, faithfully caring for the "property" that He has lent us.

Rabbi Wein I'VE GOT YOUR BACK

The president of the United States has recently reassured us and proclaimed that "America has Israel's back". Given the recent controversies between the prime minister of Israel and the president of the United States, this message was meant to soothe the relationship between the two countries and to allow for a more positive progression of policies that would be in their mutual interest.

The president of the United States also said that he retains the right to criticize and chastise Israel over policies that he feels to be wrong and even harmful to its own welfare. He declared that Israel somehow has departed from the founding views and policies that almost seventy years ago created it as a state. He, like many others before him and probably after him as well, knows better than we do what is good for us and how moral and just we should be.

By stating that "America has Israel's back" he is now free and even compelled to judge Israel and its policies and government from the lofty level of the

high ground that he has staked out. There is no question that the United States, from the beginning of the State of Israel till today, has remained a loyal friend and a great supplier of practical and diplomatic help to the Jewish state. There is also no question that the wise course for any Israeli leader is not to be viewed as being hostile or unfriendly to the persona and policies of the American president.

Yet, over the decades since the establishment of the State of Israel, America and its presidential leaders have often adopted policies that have proven to be counterproductive to the interests of the State of Israel, and in fact, of the United States as well. America is not blameless nor spotless in the creation of the terrible mess in which the Middle East finds itself today. It should therefore be somewhat wary, if not even humble when offering advice to those who actually have to live in that Middle East.

Over the long history of the Jewish people we have had many enemies but we have also had numerous non-Jews who were good friends and appreciated the special role of the Jewish people in the story of human civilization. Nevertheless, at moments of terrible danger and crisis when Jews were being persecuted and slaughtered, no nation, no matter how friendly its citizens may have been disposed towards Jews and Judaism, ever really had our back.

In World War II when European Jewry was almost completely annihilated, the Allies were, or felt themselves to be, powerless to somehow prevent the Holocaust from occurring. The debate amongst historians and scholars as to why the railroads and trains leading to the death camps of Poland were never bombed will undoubtedly continue for years to come.

But whatever the reason and no matter how legitimate the justification for inaction may have been, the simple fact is that those trains and rails never were bombed. And the behavior of most of the Allied countries towards refugees and survivors of the Holocaust and the emerging State of Israel was at the most tepid and at the least hostile. Thus Jews can be excused for not excitedly responding to words and platitudes, no matter how well-meaning about others, having our back. Does anyone really believe that the United States will go to war on behalf of Israel?

The reality teaches us that we alone have our back - and front as well. We need help from the world and we certainly hope to receive it diplomatically, politically and financially. We hope that the United States will continue to provide us with the type of help

in the future as it has in the past. However, nations have interests and not friends, and strategic goals that are not usually affected by emotion or bravado.

We would do well to accept the words of the president of the United States and be thankful for his statement. But we would be foolish if we somehow relied on the United States or any other country in the world to truly have our back and to think they would take up the cudgel of actual military action on our behalf.

We all know that ultimately the God of Israel has our back. The Talmud long ago taught us that relying on humans is a futile policy and that ultimately our reliance can only be placed in the God of Israel, Who has guided us and preserved us against all odds until today. It is nice to hear reassuring words of support but let no one think that somehow those words gives one license to play with the future of the Jewish people and its state. With God's help, Israel will survive and will prosper because of Israel itself

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Two Versions of the Moral Life

The parsha of Naso contains the laws relating to the nazirite – an individual who undertook, usually for a limited period of time, to observe special rules of holiness and abstinence: not to drink wine or other intoxicants (including anything made from grapes), not to have his hair cut and not to defile himself by contact with the dead.

The Torah does not make a direct evaluation of the nazirite. On the one hand it calls him "holy to God" (Num. 6: 8). On the other, it rules that when the period comes to an end the nazirite has to bring a sin offering (Num. 6: 13-14), as if he had done something wrong.

This led to a fundamental disagreement between the rabbis in Mishnaic, Talmudic and medieval times. According to Rabbi Elazar, and later to Nahmanides, the nazirite is worthy of praise. He has voluntarily chosen a higher level of holiness. The prophet Amos (2: 11) says, "I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and your young men for nazirites," suggesting that the nazirite, like the prophet, is a person especially close to God. The reason he had to bring a sin offering was that he was now returning to ordinary life. The sin lay in ceasing to be a nazirite.

Rabbi Eliezer ha-Kappar and Shmuel held the opposite opinion. The sin lay in becoming a nazirite in the first place, thereby denying himself some of the pleasures of the world God created and declared

good. Rabbi Eliezer added: "From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life." [1]

Clearly the argument is not merely textual. It is substantive. It is about asceticism, the life of self-denial. Almost every religion knows the phenomenon of people who, in pursuit of spiritual purity, withdraw from the pleasures and temptations of the world. They live in caves, retreats, hermitages, monasteries. The Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls may have been such a movement.

In the Middle Ages there were Jews who adopted similar self-denial – among them the Hassidei Ashkenaz, the Pietists of Northern Europe, as well as many Jews in Islamic lands. In retrospect it is hard not to see in these patterns of behaviour at least some influence from the non-Jewish environment. The Hassidei Ashkenaz who flourished during the time of the Crusades lived among self-mortifying Christians. Their southern counterparts may have been familiar with Sufism, the mystical movement in Islam.

The ambivalence of Jews toward the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were ascetic movements in the first centuries of the Common Era in both the West (Greece) and the East (Iran) that saw the physical world as a place of corruption and strife. They were, in fact, dualists, holding that the true God was not the creator of the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. The two best known movements to hold this view were Gnosticism in the West and Manichaeism in the East. So at least some of the negative evaluation of the nazirite may have been driven by a desire to discourage Jews from imitating non-Jewish practices.

What is more puzzling is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative, in the same book, his law code the Mishneh Torah. In The Laws of Ethical Character, he adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer ha-Kappar: "A person may say: 'Desire, honour and the like are bad paths to follow and remove a person from the world, therefore I will completely separate myself from them and go to the other extreme.' As a result, he does not eat meat or drink wine or take a wife or live in a decent house or wear decent clothing . . . This too is bad, and it is forbidden to choose this way." [2]

Yet in The Laws of the Nazirite he rules in accordance with the positive evaluation of Rabbi

Elazar: "Whoever vows to G-d [to become a nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy . . . Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet." [3] How does any writer come to adopt contradictory positions in a single book, let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer lies in one of Maimonides' most original insights. He holds that there are two quite different ways of living the moral life. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (hassid) and the sage (hakham).

The sage follows the "golden mean," the "middle way." The moral life is a matter of moderation and balance, charting a course between too much and too little. Courage, for example, lies midway between cowardice and recklessness. Generosity lies between profligacy and miserliness. This is very similar to the vision of the moral life as set out by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics.

The saint, by contrast, does not follow the middle way. He or she tends to extremes, fasting rather than simply eating in moderation, embracing poverty rather than acquiring modest wealth, and so on.

At various points in his writings, Maimonides explains why people might embrace extremes. One reason is repentance and character transformation. [4] So a person might cure himself of pride by practicing, for a while, extreme self-abasement. Another is the asymmetry of the human personality. The extremes do not exert an equal pull. Cowardice is more common than recklessness, and miserliness than over-generosity, which is why the hassid leans in the opposite direction. A third reason is the lure of the surrounding culture. This may be so opposed to religious values that pious people choose to separate themselves from the wider society, "clothing themselves in woolen and hairy garments, dwelling in the mountains and wandering about in the wilderness," differentiating themselves by their extreme behavior.

This is a very nuanced presentation. There are times, for Maimonides, when self-denial is therapeutic, others when it is factored into Torah law itself, and yet others when it is a response to an excessively hedonistic age. In general, though, Maimonides rules that we are commanded to follow the middle way, whereas the way of the saint is lifnim mi-shurat hadin, beyond the strict requirement of the law. [5]

Moshe Halbertal, in his recent, impressive study of Maimonides, [6] sees him as finessing the fundamental tension between the civic ideal of the

Greek political tradition and the spiritual ideal of the religious radical for whom, as the Kotzker Rebbe said, "The middle of the road is for horses." To the hassid, Maimonides' sage can look like a "self-satisfied bourgeois."

Essentially, these are two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of the moral life to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create a decent, just and compassionate society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. That is what makes Maimonides so acute a thinker. He realizes that you can't have both. They are in fact different enterprises.

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint's own family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint's own country? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. Yet you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Ultimately, saints are not really interested in society. Their concern is the salvation of the soul.

This deep insight is what led Maimonides to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the nazirite. The nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a hassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable and exemplary.

But it is not the way of the sage – and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The sage is not an extremist, because he or she realizes that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one's own family and the others within one's own community. There is a country to defend and an economy to sustain. The sage knows he or she cannot leave all these commitments behind to pursue a life of solitary virtue. For we are called on by God to live in the world, not escape from it; in society not seclusion; to strive to create a balance among the conflicting pressures on us, not to focus on some while neglecting the others.

Hence, while from a personal perspective the nazirite is a saint, from a societal perspective he is, at least figuratively, a "sinner" who has to bring an atonement offering.

Maimonides lived the life he preached. We know from his writings that he longed for seclusion. There were years when he worked day and night to write his Commentary to the Mishnah, and later the Mishneh

Torah. Yet he also recognised his responsibilities to his family and to the community. In his famous letter to his would-be translator Ibn Tibbon, he gives him an account of his typical day and week, in which he had to carry a double burden as a world-renowned physician and an internationally sought halakhist and sage. He worked to exhaustion. There were times when he was almost too busy to study from one week to the next. Maimonides was a sage who longed to be a saint – but knew he could not be, if he was to honour his responsibilities to his people. That seems to me a profound judgment, and one still relevant to Jewish life today.

[1] Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a.

[2] Hilkhhot Deot 3:1.

[3] Hilkhhot Nezirut 10: 14.

[4] See his Eight Chapters (the introduction to his commentary on Mishnah, Avot), ch. 4, and Hilkhhot Deot, chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6.

[5] Hilkhhot Deot 1: 5.

[6] Moshe Halbertal, Maimonides: Life and Thought, Princeton University Press, 2014, 154-163.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

“And they shall put my name upon the Sons of Israel and I shall bless them” (6:27)

This was an extraordinary prerogative which Hashem conferred upon the Cohanim, that because of their pronouncing the blessings upon Israel these blessings would be fulfilled. But one important purpose of this arrangement by Hashem is clearly apparent: that the people should desire the approval of the Cohen.

Of the Cohanim it was said: “They shall teach your judgments to Jacob, and your Torah to Israel; they shall

put incense to your nose and whole-burnt offering upon your Mizbeach (Alter)” (Devarim 33:10).

“And you shall come to the Cohanim, the Levites, or to the judge...and you shall do according to the word that they shall tell you...you shall not turn aside to the right or the left” (ibid. 17:10-11).

When Israel's blessings would depend on the utterances of the Cohen, the nation would certainly seek to find favor in the eyes of the Cohen and obey their teachings with more alacrity. We learn here the lesson that Hashem blesses those whom His servants favor. The Cohanim are singled out by the Torah, but in principle we perceive that Hashem hearkens to the blessings of all that serve Him: “He that has in his home someone that is ill, should go to a Torah Sage to pray for him” (Baba Batra 116A). Men are thereby

induced to obey the Torah teachers because they understand that Hashem would hearken to blessings of His servants upon other men. Thus a father urged his son to go to the Sages that had come to town “so that they should bless you” (Moed Kattan 9B). We

thereby seek to obey the Sages and to find favor in their eyes, for the Cohanim and the Sages are heard by Hashem when they utter blessings.

Question: “Israelites are blessed by Cohanim; who blesses the Cohanim?” (Hullin 49A). One answer (ibid.): “and I shall bless them” means “I shall bless the Cohanim” when they bless My people. Another answer (ibid.) is that Hashem told Abraham “I shall bless those who bless you” (Beresheet 12:3). Both answers teach an extremely valuable lesson: To Bless Jews is a deed which is richly rewarded by Hashem. Even when the blessing was said as a formality, as when a gentile encountered the Nasi, the Nasi declared that the gentile would receive Hashem's blessing in accordance with the declaration to Abraham

“I shall bless those who bless you”.

Then how much greater is the blessing of Hashem upon those that wholeheartedly bless a Jew! He that passes a Jewish home and utters blessings upon that household, although none but Hashem heard his words, has thereby gained a blessing from Hashem Himself. “For Hashem loves only those that love Israel” (Mesilat Yesharim Ch. 19). Quoted from “Journey into Greatness” by Rabbi Miller ZT'L

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