

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE NASO/SHABUOT

Shabuot will be celebrated on Wednesday & Thursday, June 4 & 5.
MAY 31, 2014 2 SIVAN 5774

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Edward M. Dweck – Ezra Ben Frieda 3, Sivan

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting this Friday evening is at 8:00 p.m. Shir Hashirim 7:15 Mincha at 7:30 SHARP

Thanks to all of you who joined us at 7:30 on Friday.

Please be on time this Shabbat – we really appreciate it!

SHABBAT Class at 8:30, Relevant Daily Halachot based upon the teaching of HaRav Ovadia Yosef Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:17AM

We will endeavor to keep it to the 7 aliyot, somech, samuch and maftir each week.

Kiddush

Sponsored by Barbara Levy in memory of her husband Shlomo and her son Yaakov Baruch and Elsa Farbiarz in memory of Elsa's parents, Albert and Sarah Arditti

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30

Ages 0-5 - 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 from 5:30 to 6:30

We are doing this program with the Bach and the program will be held at

The Sephardic Congregation for the latter part of the summer.

Pirkei Avot with Rav Aharon at 6:30

Mincha at 7:15 – Followed by Seudah Shelishi at 7:45

Class with David – What went wrong at Har Sinai – The Torah teaches us about relationships! AMAZING!

Birkat HaMazon at 8:40

Arbit at 8:45 - Shabbat Ends – 9:00

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon, Tues and Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Monday)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai 7:30

Daily class with Rabbi Colish - Weekday 6:30 AM (ADDITIONAL NEW TIME Sunday Mornings 7:30)

Kaballah as a Guide to Spiritual Growth based upon the teachings of Likutei Moharan

TENTATIVE SHAVUOT SCHEDULE

Tuesday Night , June 3 - Candle Lighting – 8:05, Mincha Services – 7:45pm - Do not begin Kiddush at home if possible until 8:45 Tikun LeI Shavuot – 11:00pm

Wednesday, June 4 – 1st Day of Shavuot - Sunrise Minyan begins at 4:30 AM, Sunrise at 5:24.34 - Regular services begin at 9AM – No Kiddush but Phyllis invites everyone for deserts after services. Return for Azharot and Mincha at 7:30 followed by Arbit Candle Lighting – After 9:05pm

Thursday, June 5– 2nd Day of Shavuot - Morning Services – 9:00am, Yizkor – about 10:30AM – Gala Kiddush sponsored by the sisterhood follows. Azharot and Mincha – 7:30 pm Holiday ends – 9:06

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame. Mincha at 4PM through October 30th – Please join us! 212-289-2100

Editors Notes

Kabbalah and the Oral Torah

Last week I was praying in a Synagogue when someone came over and sat next to me. He was reading an article which called out a number of community halachic practices where we don't follow Shulchan Aruch but where we follow Kabbalah. The article went on to question this practice, to criticize this practice and then to call any kabalistic based halachot, the original reform movement.

The man, who is probably a dozen years or more my elder, then asked if believe that the Kabbalah as we have it is part of the oral law transmitted from Moshe at Sinai. I told him that I did, but for a more detailed explanation, he should ask his rabbi. He told me that he reads the newsletter every week for many years, so I'm his rabbi. I responded that one needs to have a two way personal relationship with his rabbi and his rabbi has to know and understand him in order to know and understand how things need to be explained and presented.

He pressed me on the kabbalah question bringing up secular scholars and critics. He then babbled on about the new black hats and the new white hats in the community. He complained about the new laws we are hearing and the lack of rational basis. I stopped and asked a question. Was there any rabbi he felt was a good fit for the community and whom he would have respected completely? He responded that it was Rabbi Jacob Kassin, z'sl. That was a righteous man who knew and understood the community in a way that everyone respected him and followed what he said.

I asked him if he knew what Rabbi Jacob Kassin's thoughts on Kabbalah were. He didn't. I then in kidding way chastised him explaining that if he read my newsletter each week for all these years, he

might remember what I wrote 6 or 7 years ago on the subject.

As we enter the holiday of Shavuot, the holiday commemorating our preparation to receive the Torah, commemorating the National revelation of G-d to our Nation, commemorating an event that never occurred prior and would never occur again, commemorating the foundation of our religion; we must remind ourselves that we not only accepted the written Torah, we accepted the oral Torah as well. And we remain connected to that event in an unbroken chain of father to son and teacher to student extending back 3500 years to Moses himself.

Kabbalah has taken a pretty bad rap in recent years. Infected as we are by popular culture, Kabbalah has sadly become synonymous with Hollywood, movie stars, rock singers, holy water, insurance salesmen who call themselves Rabbis and charlatans with beards and robes selling blessings for small fortunes. Authors all over, some Jewish, most not, write about Kabbalah, centers teach it and cults claim to be bound to it. Peddled in the street in combination with red strings, amulets and magic causes us to distance ourselves from it. And those leading the retreat are the ones who call themselves the educated rationalists.

Well if those who criticize Kabbalah want to run from Madonna, Ashton, and the Berg Boys, let them lead the way for all of us. But too often they confuse Hollywood Kabbalah with authentic Torah Kabbalah.

It is important especially for our community to remember that our grandparents and great grandparents were raised surrounded by authentic Torah Kabbalah. Our heritage extends hundreds of years during which we were bound not just to the Torah, Gemarah and Shulchan Aruch, but to the Zohar as well. Our fathers read from it as children, our teachers included its lessons and teaching in their weekly derashot.

But this authentic Kabbalah has also found itself under attack using the arguments of Biblical critics and so called scholars from secular universities. And this assault using the point of view of these academics is even coming from within our community and being directed to the many innocent and naïve among us.

Heaven forbid that we delude ourselves into following the path of our brothers led astray by those calling themselves Rabbis under the banner of reform, conservative and reconstructionist, who deny the authenticity of the oral Torah (and worse). Are we to

become like the Roman who approaches Hillel and asks to be converted on condition that he accept the written Torah and not the oral Torah. Have we so quickly forgotten the lesson in Hillel's response? Do we wish to follow the path of the literalist Sidukim who have perished from the face of the earth?

And what comprises the oral law? It is the Mishnah, it is the Gemarah, it is the halacha and it is the Kabbalah including the Zohar HaKadosh. And we attribute the Zohar to Rav Shimon Bar Yochai, whose tradition extends back to Moshe Rabeynu himself. To call the Zohar a man-made creation of the middle ages is to deny the heritage of our community and of our nation. To denigrate those who teach it and those who follow it is a terrible sin.

King Solomon tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. We think that our generation is the first to face critics, its not! The arguments presented against authentic Kabbalah have been heard before. So prior to choosing to accept the arguments of Biblical critics and university scholars as valid, we should know there is another side to this discussion. And before we get up to denigrate the Kabbalah, the Zohar or our sages we should tread with the greatest trepidation, because it's a trip we don't want to take.

As our community has been blessed with tremendous growth, we have sadly experienced some schisms. Thank G-d we remember we are one community, but sometimes we break up into our little groups of black hats and white hats of grey hats and brown hats. Some people denounce this Rabbi and others denounce that Rabbi. Each claims to represent the true heritage and we get confused. But if we move the clock back a few years, there was one Rabbi we all listened to.

Rabbi Jacob Kassin, z'sl became the Chief Rabbi of our community in 1933 and remained in that position until his passing in 1994. For more than six decades he kept our community together. He was the Rabbi of all of us, the one all of us loved, the one all of us respected, the one who married us, or our parents or our grandparents or perhaps even all three generations. He was the Rabbi of the Black hats and the Rabbi of the white hats. He was the Rabbi of the observant and even of the non-observant. He was accepted by all and his word was accepted by all.

Well Rabbi Kassin faced a similar situation many years ago. When people who would otherwise be counted as those following Torah and Misvot were led astray and in turn led others to disbelieve the validity of the Kabbalah and the Zohar. What follows is the introduction page to a book entitled, "Yesod

HaEmunah", the Foundation of Faith by our revered sage Haham Yaakov Kassin. The book was written around the year 1930. It was re-published again in 1981.

We should remember his words and take them as a warning before we become receptive to the words of those who criticize our tradition and our heritage. And more so, one who wishes to step up to the pulpit and extend his thoughts to others must weigh what he says in light of Rabbi Kassin's words and warnings. Who among us wants to be the cause of the stumbling of others? Who among us wants to cause a Hilul Hashem, a desecration of Hashem's name? Is there a graver sin?

From Rabbi Kassin: At the outset, this should be made known; that during the last month of the year 5686 (1926), I witnessed a scandalous 'whisper of a driven leaf' - pamphlets that were 'an effort of the evil spirit' wherein were published a futile responsum, consisting of emptiness and deception from a man who considers himself wise in his own eyes. He is 'Anonymous' from Yemen, who has already been excommunicated in the year 5674 (1914), together with all his followers, by the rabbis and the righteous Bet Din (Rabbinical Court) in the Holy City of Jerusalem, as related there. And now, this man has reverted to his evil ways; he is still defiant, mocking the words of the sages by maintaining that he does not believe in the words of the Qabbalah and the Holy Zohar, from whose waters we drink.

Behold, at first I restrained myself from writing anything on this matter, since the earlier sages themselves upon whom the House of Israel depend and who revealed the secrets of the Qabbalah - R. Shimon b. Yohai, R. Isaac Luria, R. Hayyim Vital, R. Shalom Shar'abi and many others - who dwell in the upper portion of Gan Eden would (certainly) not give credence to the words of this man, due to his low station; his words seem like falsehood and denial. Furthermore, he is included among the non-believers and heretics who deny the Torah of Moses that was given on Mt. Sinai. He himself requests from God daily, "Not to give hope to the heretics" - and yet, may God save us from them, he is worse than all of them.

.... If it is indeed true that he toils in Talmud, the Shulhan Arukh and the Posqim (Legal Codes) and that he wishes to merit a place in the Next World (Olam Ha-Ba), we have joined together to inform him that only in the following manner, can he achieve a portion in the Next World. First, he must rectify all that he has transgressed - repenting from his evil ways, to believe in the words of the saintly Qabbalists

in all their detail. For they did not fabricate, God forbid, even a minute portion of a letter (koso shel Yad)...

The Rabbi goes on to detail how this man can repair the damage he has caused.

Setting aside the Kabbalah center and the charlatans, we should not forget that Kabbalah is an authentic part of our tradition.

It's easy to fall prey to the polished arguments of the so called rationalists. We all want to be thought of as rationalists. After all what is the opposite of rational? But the title is self-given and it is these rationalists who tell us that the Torah is a product of man and not G-d. That it was written by separate authors a thousand years after Sinai. It is they who say that even if we were in Egypt, the only plagues that happened were red algae in the water or a red mud slide from up the Nile. It is the rationalists who would have us deny everything beginning with the Kabbalah. From there it is one small step down a slippery slope to losing everything.

Instead of that, lets open our eyes. Let's learn about and from the works of our great Rabbis. – From Rav Shimon bar Yohai, To the Arizal, Rav Isaac Luria and his student Rav. Hayyim Vital, From the Ohr Hachayim, R Chayim ben Attar to the Hida, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, to Rav. Shalom Shar'abi and into our generation of Rabbi Yaakob Kassin, Haham Ovadia Yosef and Haham Moredechai Eliyahu to today and Rav Yaakob Hillel and our own Rabbis from our own Synagogues. Take the opportunity to broach the subject with them, to learn with them and to grow together.

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameyach

David Bibi

Right-Wing Groups Experience a Surge of Support Across Europe: Extremists Victorious in European Parliament Elections

Analysis and Overview by Dr. Shimon Samuels, Simon Wiesenthal Center's Paris-based Director of International Relations

Only hours after a terrorist murdered four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and a day after two people were attacked as they left Sabbath services in Paris, Europeans went to the polls to vote in the European Parliamentary elections.

The newly-elected parliamentarians represent France's National Front, Greece's extremist Golden Dawn, Hungary's Jobbik, and for the first time a representative from the German NPD, neo-Nazi party. The core constituencies of these political parties are attracted by xenophobia, nativist nationalism, anti-immigrant rhetoric (especially against Muslims), and anti-Semitism.

The case of the French National Front (FN) is more complicated. Its founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, was condemned by courts on several occasions for blatant anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. His daughter and successor, Marine Le Pen, walked away with 25% of the vote and sent shockwaves throughout France and the rest of Europe, with French Prime Minister Manuel Valls calling it a "political earthquake".

Below is the tally for the 77 MEP's (Members of the European Parliament) that the Simon Wiesenthal Center will be monitoring in the weeks and months to come:

Austria Freedom Party (gained 20% of the vote)
Denmark People's Party (gained 27% of the vote)
Finland Finns Party
France National Front (FN) (gained 25% of the vote)
Germany NPD neo-Nazi
Greece Golden Dawn neo-Nazi
Hungary Jobbik neo-Nazi (gained 15% of the vote)
Italy Liga Nord
Netherlands Freedom Party
United Kingdom UKIP

Foreseeing the election outcome, on May 7th, Dr. Samuels requested that European Union Vice-President, Baroness Catherine Ashton:

- Condemn the entry of hatemongers into the European Parliament
- Launch an investigation into their sources of funding
- Urge the Parliamentary faction blocs to ostracize them time.

Pope Francis' unfriendly visit By Caroline B. Glick

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman were right when they blamed the noxious anti-Israel incitement rampant in Europe for Saturday's murderous shooting attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and the assault and battery of two Jewish brothers outside their synagogue in a Paris suburb later that day.

Anti-Israel incitement is ubiquitous in Europe and is appearing in ever-widening circles of the Western world as a whole.

Until this week, the Catholic Church stayed out of the campaign to dehumanize Jews and malign the Jewish state.

Pope Benedict XVI was perceived as a friend of Israel, despite his childhood membership in the Hitler Youth. His opposition to Islam's rejection of reason, eloquently expressed at his speech at the University of Regensburg in 2006, positioned him as a religious champion of reason, individual responsibility and law — Judaism's primary contributions to humanity.

His predecessor Pope John Paul II was less willing to confront Islamic violence. But his opposition to Communism made him respect Israel as freedom's outpost in the Middle East. John Paul's visit to Israel in 2000 was in some ways an historic gesture of friendship to the Jewish people of Israel.

Both Benedict and John Paul II were outspoken champions of the Second Vatican Council and maintained doctrinal allegiance to the Church's rejection of anti-Judaism, including the charge of deicide, and its denunciation of replacement theology.

Alas, the Golden Age of Catholic-Jewish relations seems to have come to an end during Francis's visit to the Promised Land this week.

In one of his blander pronouncements during the papal visit, Netanyahu mentioned on Monday that Jesus spoke Hebrew. There was nothing incorrect about Netanyahu's statement. Jesus was after all, an Israeli Jew.

But Francis couldn't take the truth. So he indelicately interrupted his host, interjecting, "Aramaic."

Netanyahu was probably flustered. True, at the time, educated Jews spoke and wrote in Aramaic. And Jesus was educated. But the language of the people was Hebrew. And Jesus preached to the people, in Hebrew.

Netanyahu responded, "He spoke Aramaic, but he knew Hebrew."

Reuters' write-up of the incident tried to explain away the pope's rudeness and historical revisionism, asserting, "Modern-day discourse about Jesus is complicated and often political." The report went on to delicately mention, "Palestinians sometimes describe Jesus as a Palestinian. Israelis object to that."

Israelis "object to that" because it is a lie.

The Palestinians — and their Islamic and Western supporters — de-Judaize Jesus and proclaim him Palestinian in order to libel the Jews and criminalize the Jewish state. It seems like it would be the job of the Bishop of Rome to set the record straight. But instead, Francis's discourtesy indicated that at a minimum, he doesn't think the fact of Jesus's Judaism should be mentioned in polite company.

Francis's behavior during his public meeting with Netanyahu could have been brushed off as much ado about nothing if it hadn't occurred the day after his symbolic embrace of some of the worst anti-Jewish calumnies of our times, and his seeming adoption of replacement theology during his homily in Bethlehem.

Consider first Francis's behavior at the security barrier.

Reasonable people disagree about the contribution the security fence makes to the security of Israelis. But no one can reasonably doubt that it was built to protect Israelis from Palestinian terrorist murderers. And Francis ought to know this. Francis's decision to hold a photo-op at the security barrier was an act of extreme hostility against Israel and the Jewish people.

As the former Cardinal of Buenos Aires, Francis may have heard of the November 2002 massacre at Kibbutz Metzger. Metzger was founded by Argentine communists in the 1950s. Metzger is located 500 meters from the 1949 armistice lines which made it an obvious beneficiary of the security fence. But true to its radical roots, in 2002 members of the kibbutz waged a public campaign against the planned route of the security fence. They feared that it would, in the words of Metzger member Danny Dovrat, "ignite hostility and create problems" with the kibbutz's Palestinian neighbors.

Thanks to that concern, on the night of November 10, 2002, a gunman from the "moderate" US- and EU-supported Fatah terror organization faced no physical obstacle when he entered the kibbutz. Once there he killed two people on the street and then entered the home of Revital Ohayon and executed Revital and her two sons, Matan, 5, and Noam, 4 years old.

Fatah praised the attack on its website and pledged to conduct more assaults on "Zionist colonizers," and promised to continue "targeting their children as well."

Had he actually cared about the cause of peace and non-violence he claims to champion, Francis might have averred from stopping at the barrier, recognizing that doing so would defile the memory of the Ohayons and of hundreds of other Israeli Jewish families who were destroyed by Palestinian bloodlust and anti-Semitic depravity.

Instead, Francis "spontaneously" got out of his popemobile, walked over to a section of the barrier, and reverentially touched it and kissed it as if it were the Wailing Wall.

The graffiti on the section of the barrier Francis stopped at reinforced his anti-Semitic position. One of the slogans called for the embrace of the BDS campaign.

Although the economic consequences of the campaign of economic warfare against Israel in the West have been negligible, BDS's goal is not economic. The goal of the movement is to dehumanize Israelis and set apart for social ostracism anyone who refuses to embrace the anti-Jewish slanders that Jews have no right to self-determination and are morally inferior to every other religious, ethnic and national group in the world.

And that is nothing compared to the other slogan on the barrier. That one equated the Palestinians in Bethlehem to the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. In other words, it denied the Holocaust.

By standing there, kissing the barrier with its Holocaust denying slogan, Francis gave Vatican license to Holocaust denial.

And that was just the beginning.

Pope Francis met with Fatah chief Mahmoud Abbas at his presidential palace in Bethlehem. When Israel transferred control over Jesus's birthplace to Abbas's predecessor Yasser Arafat in 1996, Arafat seized the Greek Orthodox monastery next to the Church of the Nativity and turned it into his — and later Abbas's — official residence.

Standing next to Abbas on seized church property, the pope called Abbas "a man of peace."

Abbas returned the favor by calling for Israel to release all Palestinian terrorists from Israeli prisons. And the pope — who interrupted Netanyahu when he told an historic truth — said nothing.

At mass at the Church of the Nativity on Sunday, Pope Francis prayed with Latin Patriarch Fouad

Twal. In his sermon Twal accused Israelis of being the present-day version of Christ killers by referring to the Palestinians as walking "in the footsteps of the Divine Child," and likening the Israelis to King Herod.

In his words, "We are not yet done with the present-day Herods, who fear peace more than war... and who are prepared to continue killing."

Rather than condemn these remarks, Francis echoed them.

"Who are we, as we stand before the Child Jesus? Who are we, standing as we before today's children?" the pope asked.

"Are we like Mary and Joseph, who welcomed Jesus and cared for him with the love of a father and mother? Or are we like Herod, who wanted to eliminate him?"

During his visit Monday to Jerusalem, Francis embraced the Palestinian mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Muhammed Hussein. Departing from his scripted remarks which called for the pope to refer to the mufti and his associates as "dear friends," Francis called them his "dear brothers."

Hussein has been condemned by the US and the EU for his calls for the annihilation of Jews in the name of Islam.

In 2012, Hussein said it was the destiny of Muslims to kill Jews, who he claims are subhuman beasts and "the enemies of Allah." He has also praised suicide bombers and said their souls "tell us to follow in their path."

Francis didn't condemn him.

Francis stridently condemned the anti-Jewish attacks in Brussels and Paris. And during his ceremonial visits to Yad Vashem, the Wailing Wall and the terror victims memorial he said similarly appropriate things. But all of his statements ring hollow and false in light of his actions.

Israelis and Jews around the world need to be aware of what is happening. Francis is leading the Catholic Church in a distressingly anti-Jewish direction.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The family of Gershon is assigned to carry the curtains and tapestries of the Mishkan. The family of Merrari is assigned to carry the beams, poles, and sockets that comprised the walls of the Mishkan.

2nd Aliya: The families of Gershon and Merrari are counted.

3rd Aliya: The laws regarding sending out of the camp: the Mitzora, the Zav (a type of discharge), and anyone who has come in contact with a dead body, are stated. The law of stealing from a convert (making restitution if someone steals from a convert who then dies without any heirs) is commanded.

4th Aliya: The laws and procedures for the Sotah - the accused adulteress; and the Nazir are explained.

5th, 6th, & 7th Aliyot: The Korbonos offered by the princes of each Shevet at the inauguration of the Mizbeach are listed.

Shoftim 13:2 Around the year 2790 - 971 b.c.e., the Bnai Yisroel were subject to the rule of the Piliishtim. In the year 2810 - 951, Shimshon became the Judge - Shofet of the nation and served his people as both their greatest Tzadik and greatest warrior. This week's Haftorah tells the story of Manoach and his wife, the parents of Shimshon (Shoftim Cap. 13).

Manoach's wife was barren, and in response to her Tefilos, Hashem sent an Angel, disguised as a man, to tell Manoach's wife of her impending pregnancy. The child would have to be a Nazir from the moment of his conception, and he would grow up to save the Jews from their enemies.

Manoach requested from Hashem that the "man" appear a second time, and the Angel appeared a second time. The same instructions were repeated to both Manoach and his wife, after which Manoach invited the "man" to join them for a meal. The "man" refused the invitation but suggested to Manoach that he offer a Korban to Hashem. Manoach did so, and as the flame rose to consume the offering, the "man" entered the flames and disappeared. Manoach and his wife then realized that the "man" was really an Angel, and understood the divine significance of their, yet to be born, child.

The connection to our Parsha is the fact that Shimshon was to be a Nazir. The commentaries explain that in contrast to the laws of the Sotah - the accused adulteress, it was the merit of Manoach's wife which brought about the birth of Shimshon.

Shimshon is among the most difficult figures in Jewish history to understand. For a comprehensive presentation and explanation see, "Samson's Struggle", by Rabbi Gershon Weiss.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Death will separate me from you."(Ruth 1:17)

The custom is to read Megilat Ruth on Shabuot. The reason for this custom is that just as the Jewish nation accepted the Torah, so too Ruth accepted the Torah and converted to Judaism. From Ruth's attitude, we learn what our approach to the Torah should be.

Naomi had two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Both of them longed to return with Naomi and convert to Judaism. However, there came a point that Orpah gave in and returned home, while Ruth remained and continued to press Naomi to allow her to accompany her to the Land of Israel. What was the difference between Ruth and Orpah's attitudes that eventually divided them?

Rabbi David A. Gross explains that the difference lies in a statement that Ruth made to Naomi. She declared, "Death shall separate me from you." Ruth and Orpah both understood that entering the nation of Israel required various changes to their lifestyles. Orpah was ready to sacrifice her past ways and customs for a life of Torah. The key word in her outlook was "sacrifice." She felt she was depriving herself of luxuries and pastimes and yet she was still willing to forgo everything to become Jewish. However, like most personal sacrifices that require long-term commitment, there comes a breaking point where one says that he had enough deprivation. Orpah was willing to sacrifice things, but her resolve was only able to withstand the sacrifice for a certain period of time. After Naomi's cajoling that she should return home, Orpah finally gave in.

Imagine a class is going on a trip to Niagara Falls. The bus ride is long; it requires everyone to wake up at 5:30 a.m. so they can leave on time and enjoy a full day. The trip costs a lot of money. They return late at night exhausted with school starting on time the next morning. Does anyone feel bad for all the "sacrifice" the class made for the trip? The answer is simple; no one sacrificed anything. Everyone understands that in order to have a great time there are costs. Costs are not sacrifices.

Ruth also knew that her life must change. However, she was not sacrificing a thing. She understood that without Torah she had no life. Torah would give her life in this world and the next. "Death will separate us," she declared; she understood that to leave Naomi at this point was tantamount to giving up her life. She could not do that. If there were costs along the way for this life, they were a small price to pay for her reward.

This is the mindset that every Jew must have. There are many things in this world that we

may not “benefit” from as a result of our abiding by the Torah. However, our attitude should never be that we are deprived or must sacrifice. Rather, we should realize that we live the richest and fullest lives with our Torah observance. We have life in this world and in the next world. The various prohibitions and restrictions within our lives are small costs to pay. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The Talmud relates a fascinating episode. When Moshe went up to the heavens to receive the Torah, the heavenly angels didn't want to let the Torah go down to earth. Moshe was afraid to tackle the angels but Hashem told him to answer them. Moshe then told the angels, “Why do you want the Torah? Did you go out of Egypt? Do you have parents to honor? Do you steal, murder, etc.?” At that point they agreed with Moshe and let the Torah come down to the Jewish people and even gave Moshe “gifts.” The question is obvious. What was the angels' point and how did Moshe convince them otherwise?

The Rabbis tell us that of course the angels knew they could not fulfill the Torah. However, they wanted to be the ones to decide the laws of the Torah. If ever there is a controversy or a question, the Heavenly Academy should be the decider. Moshe told them, you have to be involved and obligated in order to decide the laws of the Torah. The Torah is not just a subject to voice our opinions on; it is a way of life. If we live a life of Torah and study thoroughly, we have the ability to expound upon it and indeed even be one of the deciders of the Torah. All of our great scholars were indeed permeated with Torah through and through and were able to decide the halachah. It's amazing that although no one would ever contradict a brain surgeon as to his field of expertise, many people venture an opinion in halachah without even studying the subject. Let us recommit ourselves this Shabuot holiday to study, to learn, to understand and indeed to live a life of Torah. Tizku Leshanim Rabot.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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The Power of Teshuba

The Torah in Parashat Naso speaks of the case of a thief who falsely denies his crime on oath and then wishes to repent. In such an instance, the Torah instructs, “Ve'heshib Et Ashamo Be'rosho Va'hamishito Yosef Alav” (5:7). Literally, this means, “He shall return what he is guilty of, its principal, and then add onto it one-fifth.” The meaning of the Pasuk is clear – the penitent criminal must repay the stolen sum plus an additional fifth – but the Torah's

formulation seems puzzling. It calls the stolen money “Ashamo” (literally, “his guilt”), and refers to the principal sum as “Be'rosho” (literally, “at its head”). In light of this unusual wording, scholars throughout the ages have unearthed deeper layers of meaning underlying the text of this Pasuk.

One approach connects this Pasuk to the Gemara's comment in Masechet Aboda Zara (5). The Gemara there states that every Misva we perform produces an angel that “walks in front of us” to the next world, whereas every sin we commit creates an angel that “embraces us” and leads us to punishment, Heaven forbid. The Maharsha (Rav Shmuel Eidels, 1555-1631) explains this passage by drawing an analogy to a king who sends two servants – one to bring someone to his feast, and another to bring someone to the gallows. The messenger bringing the man to the party walks in front of the man to lead the way, confident that the man follows him. The servant leading the man to the gallows, however, must hold him tight to prevent him from escaping. Similarly, the angels we create through our Misvot lead the way for us to Gan Eden, confident that we follow them. But if, Heaven forbid, we create angels by committing sins, they will hold us tight and bring us to our punishment, preventing us from escaping.

The process of Teshuba, however, has the ability to change the angel's mission. The Gemara elsewhere teaches that Teshuba Mi'yir'a – repentance done out of fear – has the ability to “downgrade” our sins to unintentional violations, but “Teshuba Me'ahaba” – repentance out of love for Hashem – transforms our sins into sources of merit. If we repent with sincerity, out of genuine love for our Creator which leads us to regret our wrongdoing, the misdeeds on our record are changed to Misvot. And thus the angel taking us to be punished instead leads us to our reward.

It has been suggested that this is the meaning of the phrase, “Ve'heshib Et Ashamo Be'rosho,” which can be read as, “He moves his guilt in front of him.” After one commits a sin, he has the ability to “move” his “guilt” – the angel – to his front. The angel which was created through his sin can change roles and move in front of him to lead him toward his reward, as the sin is transformed into a Misva.

And thus this section of Parashat Naso is not just outlining the procedure for one who committed theft and denied it on oath. It conveys a message relevant to each and every one of us, as we are all guilty of mistakes of one kind or another. The Torah here teaches us never to despair, to never think that we are held captive by the wrongs of our past. Even if now we are held in the clutches of the angel, and

bear a heavy burden of guilt, G-d in His infinite mercy allows us the opportunity to release ourselves from its grasp, and change its role into an angel bringing us reward, as long as we repent sincerely and out of a deep sense of love and gratitude to the Almighty. The angel does not allow us to escape – unless we repent with sincerity and make a genuine effort to lovingly return to the faithful service of Hashem, in which case it “lets us go” and leads us to our reward.

Rabbi Wein Shavuot

A strange people, we Jews. The national spiritual holiday of the Jewish people – in the words of the Torah itself, ‘the day you became a nation’ – is the one-day holiday (in Israel) of Shavuot. Even though the Torah itself describes the holiday in terms of the commandment of bringing the first fruits as an offering in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jewish tradition has highlighted the holiday as being the anniversary day of the granting of the Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai.

It is referred to in this manner in our holiday prayers, and especially in the absence of Temple service for all of these many centuries, the granting of the Torah is undoubtedly the centerpiece of the commemorative holiday. So how is this day observed and commemorated? Well, I doubt there is any other people that would commemorate such a day by staying awake all night studying and discussing serious topics, eating dairy foods, decorating all premises abundantly with flowers, adding special melodies to the Torah reading, and somehow as well, marking the anniversary of the death of the greatest king of Israel, David.

In reality, there is really no human way to truly capture and commemorate the most momentous occasion of all societal civilization. So, the human heart and spirit searches for ways to define the indefinable and to experience physically the incorporeal reality of the spiritual and the eternal. And that is the role of custom and tradition in Jewish life. It says what logic and reality, rationality and law alone cannot ever say to later generations, who were not physically present on that day of revelation at Sinai.

Custom speaks to one’s soul while the law speaks to our minds. So undoubtedly the customs of Shavuot are the conduit to our past – to that great day and event, the turning point of all human civilization. And these customs conduct us to our future and the realization of the goals that Sinai presented before us.

That is the reason why custom has such a long-lasting and tenacious hold on us. Rabbi Yaakov Emden ruefully remarked that he regretted that the prohibition against stealing was law and not custom for if it were custom people would have an emotional brake against stealing that law alone cannot do. So we can never discount the power and necessity of custom.

On the other hand, custom alone can never do the job of transmitting Torah from generation to generation. Over-emphasis on custom, ignoring law and rationality, falling victim to superstition and false forms of spirituality is a terrible distortion of that day at Sinai. The Torah always demands a sense of balance and perspective from us. Every generation, even every individual Jew, has to find this balance and equilibrium in one’s religious life.

Over the past century, with its terrible and wondrous events, all of them mysterious and unbelievable, the Jewish people as a whole and each individual Jew has searched for this secure footing of balance and perspective. I would be dishonest if I told you that I, and in fact our generation as a whole, has found that secure and correct place.

But Shavuot, with its combination of custom and law, spirit and food, natural beauty and rigorous scholarship, is a day that can help us achieve that security and balance so necessary to truly be a loyal and good Jew. After all, that is the true test of our lives and existence. That is how we will be judged and how we will be remembered.

Shavuot, like all Jewish holidays, reminds us that a good life, a Jewish life, requires sacrifice and focus. There are harsh realities in Jewish history, as in all human history as well. Shavuot commemorates terrible pogroms against innocent and hapless Jews – the Crusades and the events of 1648-9 – that occurred at this time of the year over the centuries of our exile, persecution and dispersion.

It is somewhat ironic that the memorial prayer of Yizkor is also part of the gala Shavuot prayer experience. But that is the reality of human existence, the mix of the bittersweet that is always part of living. Once again, we are witness to the balance that is the essential part of Jewish life and Torah understanding and values. Here in Israel the whole holiday is over in an instant. But the lessons that it imparts to us last for a lifetime and constantly challenge us to live up to our commitment to the events of Sinai.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Politics of Envy

Few things in the Torah are more revolutionary than its conception of leadership.

Ancient societies were hierarchical. The masses were poor and prone to hunger and disease. They were usually illiterate. They were used by rulers as a means to wealth and power rather than people with individual rights – a concept born only in the seventeenth century. At times they formed a corvee, a vast conscripted labor force, often used to construct monumental buildings intended to glorify kings. At others they were dragooned into the army to further the ruler's imperial designs.

Rulers often had absolute power of life and death over their subjects. Not only were kings and pharaohs heads of state. They also held the highest religious rank, as children of the gods or demigods themselves. Their power had nothing to do with the consent of the governed. It was seen as written into the fabric of the universe. Just as the sun ruled the sky and the lion ruled the animal realm so kings ruled their populations. That was how things were in nature, and nature itself was sacrosanct.

The Torah is a sustained polemic against this way of seeing things. Not just kings but all of us, regardless of colour, culture, creed or class, are in the image and likeness of God. In the Torah God summons his special people, Israel, to take the first steps to what might eventually become a truly egalitarian society – or to put it more precisely, a society in which dignity – kavod – does not depend on power or wealth or an accident of birth.

Hence the concept, which we will explore more fully in parshat Korach, of leadership as service. The highest title accorded to Moses in the Torah is that he was eved haShem, “a servant of God.” His highest praise is that he was “very humble, more so than anyone else on earth” (Num. 12: 3). To lead is to serve. Greatness is humility. As the book of Proverbs puts it, “A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour” (Prov. 29: 23).

The Torah points us in the direction of an ideal world, but it does not assume that we have reached it yet or are within striking distance. The people Moses led, like many of us today, were still prone to ambition, aspiration, vanity, and self-esteem. They still had the human desire for honour, status and respect. And Moses had to recognise that fact. It would be a major source of conflict in the months and years ahead. It is one of the primary themes of the book of Bamidbar.

Of whom were the Israelites jealous? Most of them did not aspire to be Moses. He was, after all, the man who spoke to God and to whom God spoke. He performed miracles, brought plagues against the Egyptians, divided the Red Sea, and gave the people water from a rock and manna from heaven. Few would have had the hubris to believe they could do any of these things.

But they did have reason to resent the fact that religious leadership seemed to be confined to one tribe, Levi, and one family within that tribe, the Cohanim, male descendants of Aaron. Now that the tabernacle was to be consecrated and the people were about to begin the second half of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land, there was a real risk of envy and animosity.

That is a constant throughout history. We desire, said Shakespeare, “this man's gift and that man's scope.” Aeschylus said, “It is in the character of very few men to honor without envy a friend who has prospered.” Goethe warned that although “Hatred is active, and envy passive dislike; there is but one step from envy to hate.” Jews should know this in their very bones. We have often been envied, and all too frequently that envy has turned to hate with tragic consequences.

Leaders need to be aware of the perils of envy, especially within the people they lead. This is one of the unifying themes of the long and apparently disconnected parsha of Naso.

In it we see Moshe confronting three potential sources of envy. The first lay within the tribe of Levi. They had reason to resent the fact that priesthood had gone to just one man and his descendants, Aaron, Moses' brother.

The second had to do with individuals who were neither of the tribe of Levi nor of the family of Aaron but who felt that they had the right to be holy in the sense of having a special, intense relationship with God in the way that the Cohanim had.

The third had to do with the leadership of the other tribes who might have felt left out of the service of the Tabernacle. We see Moses dealing sequentially with all these potential dangers.

First he gives each Levitical clan a special role in carrying the vessels, furnishings and framework of the Tabernacle whenever the people journeyed from place to place. The most sacred objects were to be carried by the clan of Kohath. The Gershonites were

to carry the cloths, coverings and drapes. The Merarites were to carry the planks, bars, posts and sockets that made up the Tabernacle's framework. Each clan was, in other words, to have a special role in place in the solemn procession as the House of God was carried through the desert.

Next he deals with individuals who aspire to a higher level of holiness. This, it seems, is the underlying logic of the Nazirite, the individual who vows to set himself apart for the Lord (Numbers 6:2). He was not to drink wine or any other grape product; he was not to have his hair cut; and he was not defile himself through contact with the dead. Becoming a Nazirite was, it seems, a way of temporarily assuming the kind of set-apartness associated with the priesthood, a voluntary extra degree of holiness.[1]

Lastly, he turns to the leadership of the tribes. The highly repetitive chapter 7 of our parsha itemizes the offerings of each of the tribes on the occasion of the dedication of the altar. Their offerings were identical, and the Torah could have abbreviated its account by describing the gifts brought by one tribe and stating that each of the other tribes did likewise. Yet the sheer repetition has the effect of emphasizing the fact that each tribe had its moment of glory. Each, by giving to the house of God, acquired its own share of honour.

These episodes are not the whole of Naso but enough of it to signal something that every leader and every group needs to take seriously. Even when people accept in principle the equal dignity of all, and even when they see leadership as service, the old dysfunctional passions die hard. People still resent the success of others. They still feel that honour has gone to others when it should have gone to them. Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kappar said: "Envy, lust and the pursuit of honour drive a person out of the world." [2]

The fact that these are destructive emotions does not stop some people – perhaps most of us – feeling them from time to time, and nothing does more to put at risk the harmony of the group.

That is one reason why a leader must be humble. He or she should feel none of these things. But a leader must also be aware that not everyone is humble. Every Moses has a Korach, every Julius Caesar a Cassius, every Duncan a Macbeth, every Othello an Iago. In many groups there is a potential trouble-maker driven by a sense of injury to his self-esteem. These are often a leader's deadliest enemies and they can do great damage to the group.

There is no way of eliminating the danger entirely, but

Moses in this week's parsha tells us how to behave. Honour everyone equally. Pay special attention to potentially disaffected groups. Make each feel valued. Give everyone a moment in the limelight if only in a ceremonial way. Set a personal example of humility. Make it clear to all that leadership is service, not a form of status. Find ways in which those with a particular passion can express it, and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute.

There is no failsafe way to avoid the politics of envy but there are ways of minimizing it, and our parsha is an object lesson in how to do so.

[1] See Maimonides, Hilkhot Shemittah ve-Yovel 13: 13.

[2] Mishnah Avot 4: 21.

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