

## SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TABO

SEPTEMBER 13, 2014

18 ELUL 5774

**DEDICATIONS:** Lezecher Nishmat Yoseph ben Shafika – Joseph A Bibi, my great grandfather 19 Elul  
Happy Birthday this week to Ralph Cohen and Charles David Haddad  
Happy anniversary to Lauren and Jonah and to Uncle Jack and Aunt Marilyn  
Mabrook to Phillip and Ruby Deutsch on their wedding  
Mabrook to Henriette and Joseph Jemal on their new baby boy

### SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting Friday evening 6:51 p.m. Shir Hashirim 6:35 Mincha at 6:50

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 9:00 AM

Kiddush sponsored by Barbara Levy  
In memory of

Her father, Leo Freiser

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

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

Pirkei Avot with Rav Aharon at 5:45

Mincha at 6:15 – Followed by Seudah Shelishi at 6:50

Seudah Shelishi Class with R' Aharon

Birkat HaMazon at 7:35 .... Arbit at 7:40 - Shabbat Ends – 7:50

### WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Selihot 6:15AM and on Sunday at 7:15AM

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

We have been having a great Sunday morning class with Sam Yusupov 9AM

Looking for Breakfast sponsors

No class this Sunday

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited

MONDAY Night – Mincha at 6:45PM - Class with Rabba Yenai 7:00 –

Daily morning class with Rabbi Colish – Will continue after the holidays

Thursday Nights 8:30-9:30 Virtual\* Class facilitated by Rabbi Yosef Colish.

Practical Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim

Krav Maga Israeli Self Defense Course for the Long Beach Jewish Community:

Sundays at 11 at the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach.

12 sessions. 1 hour each. Men only. 16 yrs old and up.

Cost: \$300 payable in 3 installments.

To join or for more information please text/call Yosef Colish @ 516-589-6102.

Start date to be announced shortly.

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And please participate with the sale of honors**

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 17th Floor, Artistic Frame. Mincha at 4PM through  
 October 30<sup>th</sup> – Please join us! 212-289-2100**

### **Editors Notes Visions - Blessings or Curses**

Ask people where the line, "I see dead people" comes from. Many will recall a movie that they may or may not have seen but whose advertisements were thrown at us about 15 years ago of a little boy whispering that line. The movie written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan, starred Haley Joel Osment as a troubled, isolated boy and an equally troubled child psychologist played by Bruce Willis who tries to help him. Anyone who thinks they see dead people usually needs help or do they?

I am going to tell you a story. It happened about 36 hours ago. My brother suggested that I write it down. And as I write this, I wonder how I would react as a rabbi, if someone told me this story. I might suggest they have a long conversation with their therapist or psychiatrist. In fact my intent is to have such a conversation with my good friend David Adler, a brilliant psychiatrist and equally keen scholar. But then I might be afraid to write about it. I wonder what a professional might tell me. I imagine he might explain that my experience was the result of a hallucinatory manifestation by my subconscious mind of suppressed or unexpressed emotions as relating to the passing of my father. Or possibly taking an alternate angle, my experience was in actuality my subconscious manifesting my hopes, dreams and reinforcing my beliefs all heavily compounded by an acute lack of sleep.

What's strange is that 36 hours later, where a dream dissipates relatively quickly, what I saw Sunday night is still clear as day. My cousin Phillip was marrying Ruby Franco. I had second thoughts about going even to the ceremony. I have not been to any wedding in the last eight months during our year of mourning for our father, but this wedding was a bit different. I feel very close to my cousin Shelly and to all her boys. I had this strong feeling that my dad would want me to be there. I thought in some way, my voice would be his voice.

As I stood under the chuppah – the wedding canopy - within the magnificent terrace room at the Plaza Hotel along with the other rabbis and chazanim, I was looking around at the beauty of the room. I watched as the wedding party matched in and as the bride came down the aisle. I saw Chantelle sitting up front

with my cousins and then suddenly my body started to shake a tears started coming from my eyes. Rabbi Eli was standing next to me and asked me if I was OK? I told him, rabbi, I'm not sure how to say this without sounding crazy, but my father just walked into the room and I can see him up to the left forward of the first section of the arcade where the orchestra is in the second and he is holding his sister Florence's hand.

The rabbi went on to tell me that he often thought of my father when he read shir hashirim as my father was careful to say each syllable and note in a strong voice not missing a beat through eight chapters. "I once asked him why he is so careful", he continued. And your dad responded, "but haham Eliyahu, is Shir HaShirim, not Kodesh HaKodashim"? And as the rabbi spoke my father's image became clearer with a huge smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye which acknowledged me. Then behind him came his parents. Then his brother Eli appeared at my dad's right. His sister Sara came between them and then Lillian came in to the right of Eli. Then I saw Florence who is the grandmother of the groom who was holding my father's left hand; reach out with her left hand and she drew her husband Phillip in. I didn't recognize him as he passed away more than four decades ago. And I saw everyone smiling. It was very clear and the picture is still vivid.

Rabbi Mansour began speaking to the bride and groom and told them of their relatives who had passed who were here with them now and as he said that I looked up again. They were there but my father was gone. Where did he go? And then I saw my father come back in and he had the hand of Morris Franco his Morris was holding the hand of his brother Harry, the grandfather of the bride. And as Harry's son Jack looked at his own daughter Ruby, the bride his face lit up and at the same time I saw how bright Harry was with a huge smile and dressed in a white suit, white tie and shirt. It was vivid. Harry's son Isaac told me later he felt something and kept turning around and what he felt I saw. Isaac's own father was standing behind him.

And when the glass was broken I saw them all fade back, all with smiles and filled with light.

Now I wondered if I had completely lost my mind. I already told Rabbi Mansour. Do I tell my cousin Shelly that I saw her mother standing there? I felt I had to. And when I did, I knew it was the right thing. But she wanted me to tell the brides aunt. I walked into the reception to say hello and good night to my mom and a cousin stopped me to ask if it was true, and then the father of the bride and the uncle of the

bride and by then I figured everyone either thought I was nuts or some holy man. And hopefully I am neither.

As I left the reception the bride and groom were coming in. Chantelle walked me out and asked me all sorts of questions. Did I see them with my eyes closed or open? Open. What were they wearing? Things I believe I once saw them wear. Did they say anything? No. Was anyone else there? I thought so and at the time said to myself that others were there but I was limited to the image my imagination could construct. And that image remained and remains as clear as if they were all really there.

And I was concerned. I had just taught a class on visions coming from the dark side based on what Rabbi Yaakov Hillel wrote about on last week's portion. Was it that or was it a day dream. I thought of a verse from Yirmiyahu, "The vision of their heart (or imagination) they speak, not from the mouth of the Hashem". But there were no messages, just peace, joy and happiness.

I paid a condolence call to a friend earlier in the week and explained that people often leave a mourner and after stating the verse, "May God console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem", they close by saying semachot or simchas – as a blessing that we see each other next time at good occasions. I explained that I was told that this blessing of Semachot may in fact be a blessing that we should be blessed to have joyous occasions because it is at those occasions that those who have passed are given permission to join us and we can really feel their presence. Some even deliver invitations to the kever. Was it this that brought on this vision I wondered?

As I went to sleep that night I was obviously pre-occupied with the whys. I recalled Sefer Chassidim which records that Rav Yehuda Hanasi passed away, he used to visit his home every Friday evening at dusk. Dressed in Shabbat clothes, he would recite Kiddush. One Friday night there was a knock at the door. The maid asked the visitor to come back because Rabbeinu HaKadosh was in the middle of Kiddush. From then on he stopped coming, since he did not want his visits to become public knowledge.

The Arizal speaks of those who see Eliyahu Hanavi and others and explains that what they are seeing is not a created being of this lower world, it is not a material entity, but rather the "chaluka d'Rabbanan", the refined "garment" that soul's of the other world wear.

The Shenei Luchot HaBrit teaches that souls of sadikim are bound up in the domain of eternal life and those souls wear no "garment" that would make them perceivable in this world. That is except for rare occasions as mentioned in the Talmud when they do dress in some kind of "garment" to make themselves visible.

The Chida's Shem G'dolim discusses the ability of a righteous person to return to the physical world following his passing.

On the one hand I know that what I saw was a manifestation of my imagination; a hallucination of sorts. At the same time, my mind's eye saw something and knew that we were not alone. I asked, If one experiences a hallucination like this, rational thinking might lead to the logical conclusion that I'm going totally bonkers. But am I?

Almost certainly not, says New York University neurologist Oliver Sacks. Hallucinations are quite prevalent among the general population. In 2000, Stanford researchers surveyed 13,000 people on the matter. 38.7% of respondents reported experiencing some form of hallucination at one point in their lives. And a 1993 study examined a more sensitive topic: seeing the dead. Researchers queried people in their early seventies who had lost a loved one in the previous year. About one-third of the subjects reported seeing, hearing, or talking to their deceased spouses in the months following their death. Contrary to what one might think those that experienced these hallucinations considered them "helpful" to the grieving process.

Finally, Oliver Sacks a professor of neurology at the N.Y.U. School of Medicine wrote : Hallucinations can have a positive and comforting role, too — this is especially true with bereavement hallucinations, seeing the face or hearing the voice of one's deceased spouse, siblings, parents or child — and may play an important part in the mourning process. Such bereavement hallucinations frequently occur in the first year or two of bereavement, when they are most "needed."

OK, so I'm not nuts. This wasn't some curse. In fact it was a wonderful blessing.

I hope my friend David Adler will agree.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

## Thank God for the Republican gentiles By JACKIE MASON

Every Jew is raised to think it's his moral obligation to help and love the weak and the underdog.

Thank God that the fighting in Gaza has stopped for the moment. If Israel sneezes, Hamas and the others may start the fireworks again and Israel will again be forced to defend itself.

If that happens, I'll say thank God for the Republican gentiles.

If the Evangelicals didn't fight for the Jews, you would never know that the Jews even have a right to defend themselves. Historically, Jews have always been too helpless and guilt-ridden to fight back when attacked. If you attack a Muslim, you will be pleading for your life in a flash; insult a black person and your foot will stop working for a month. But if you attack a Jew, he will be so busy wondering what the Jews did to make you so violent, that he won't even notice that he is still bleeding.

The fact that Jews have always been so helpless is the reason that Diaspora Jews are so amazed by the military power of Israel and the unbelievable heroism of its troops. It is amazing that while Hamas rains rockets on the State of Israel, the guilt-ridden liberal Jews of America can't find any reason to condemn it: They can't feel comfortable unless they see the Palestinians as victims of Israeli oppression. To create the idea that a Hamas terrorist is a victim is as much a fantasy as saying that Adolf Hitler was a victim of the Jews.

Every Jew is raised to think it's his moral obligation to help and love the weak and the underdog.

And if he can't find one, he needs to invent one.

Palestinian rockets can be storming all over Israel and liberal American Jews are convinced if Israel didn't persecute them, this never would've happened. Only a pathetically perverted sick Jewish mind could believe this. The Jewish guilt trip knows no limit. That is why we face the insanity of watching Hamas send rockets to Israel determined to kill innocent civilians while Israel sends leaflets, emails and makes phone calls pleading with Palestinians to flee out of the way of rockets so that innocents won't be harmed. It is unbelievable that while the charter of Hamas calls for the total destruction of Israel, the Jews of America somehow manage never to have heard about it, although Hamas makes it obvious by its behavior each and every day.

When three Jewish teenagers were murdered in June, Palestinians were jumping, dancing and celebrating in the streets; but when a Palestinian teen was killed, all of Israel expressed their national sorrow and they were begging for forgiveness.

The contrast between the mentality of Israel and the mentality of Hamas was never so loudly expressed as when the Arab killers became heroes and the Jewish killers became prisoners.

Every militant knows that if you are caught trying to kill Jews and happen to get wounded, the Jews are the only people in the history of warfare who will provide the best medical attention in order to save your life. Isn't it a weird irony that while a Hamas terrorist is trying to destroy Israeli lives, Israelis decide to save his life? Palestinian sympathizers have chosen to avoid the simple fact that the rockets raining on Israel are no different than the bombs that struck America on 9-11: just as America did nothing to deserve it, neither has the State of Israel.

What could we do that would stop Hamas from its determination to destroy the State of Israel? The answer is nothing. But the Israelis have always wanted peace so desperately that they kept imagining that anything is possible.

Israelis have constantly negotiated with the powerless Palestinian Authority, while Hamas's pledge to destroy Israel remains. We are now listening to the 12th secretary of state and the 14th president trying to accomplish a negotiated settlement.

Israel has long demanded that Hamas give up its terrorist goals, which won't happen; and it was right and necessary to destroy all its arms and the tunnels built to terrorize and kill Israelis.

But the guilt-trip of the liberal American Jew has made him into a walking mess of insanity, inventing the idea of Hamas as victims when they are really a mob of would-be mass murderers. It is amazing that only American Jews are deranged enough to believe this.

Even the other Arab countries surrounding the State of Israel are secretly hiding from Hamas (The New York Times, July 30, "Arab Leaders, Viewing Hamas as Worse Than Israel, Stay Silent," David D. Kirkpatrick), fleeing from any connection to them. Only the insane thinking of the liberal Jews in America can manage to find an excuse for it. That's why, as I said before, thank God for the Republican

gentiles. Without them, nobody in America would think Israel should defend itself from Hamas.

The writer is stand-up comedian who has had several well-received one-man Broadway stage shows.

**13 years after 9/11**

**Still a long way to go**

**Clifford D. May is president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on national security, and a foreign affairs columnist for The Washington Times.**

Do not call what happened 13 years ago this week a tragedy. It was a terrorist atrocity, an act of war and a war crime. Very different.

The self-proclaimed jihadis responsible for hijacking commercial jets and using them as missiles targeted the World Trade Center because it was a Western financial capital, a place where men and women of many ethnicities and religions worked in peace to create prosperity. Another plane was flown into the Pentagon, the brain of the greatest liberation army the world has ever known. One more jet was meant to hit the political heart of the Free World -- the Capitol or the White House -- but Americans on that flight refused to surrender and won a battle.

September 11 was not a date chosen at random. I'm inclined to credit the explanation offered by the late Christopher Hitchens, a man of the Left who dissented from the Left's tendency to condone savagery directed at Americans. "It was on September 11, 1683, that the conquering armies of Islam were met, held, and thrown back at the gates of Vienna," he wrote in The Guardian on Oct. 2, 2001.

That defeat of the Ottoman Empire and Islamic caliphate was "a hinge event in human history," he wrote. From then on, "it was more likely that Christian or Western powers would dominate the Muslim world than the other way around."

Most Muslims do not seethe over a 17th century war any more than most Americans nurse a grudge against the descendants of King George III. But those whom we have come to call Islamists regard the failure of Muslim forces to conquer Europe as "a humiliation in itself and a prelude to later ones." Hitchens added one more observation, particularly relevant this summer: "The forces of the Islamic Jihad in Gaza once published a statement saying that they could not be satisfied until all of Spanish Andalusia had been restored to the faithful as well."

Those who understand such matters know that 9/11 was not about America's chickens "coming home to roost," as the Rev. Jeremiah Wright unforgettably characterized the murder of 3,000 Americans. Nor was it a protest against imperialism, colonialism and occupation -- an attempt to address "legitimate grievances." It was about a vision of the past and the future. It was about power and, uncomfortably, about faith.

The actions Western leaders have taken to counter this threat have been insufficient. Al-Qaida and its affiliates now operate in more countries than ever. An al-Qaida splinter, the Islamic State, has seized much of Syria and Iraq, declaring a caliphate, a successor to the one defeated at Vienna.

The Muslim Brotherhood -- an organization whose motto includes the phrase "jihad is our way" -- is regarded favorably by those who lead Turkey, a NATO ally, and rule Qatar, where the U.S. maintains a military base and American universities and think tanks have established campuses.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is keeping its eye on the ball, that ball being nuclear weapons, the great equalizer, although equality is not at all what Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have in mind. They are not cooperating with an International Atomic Energy Agency investigation into "the possible military dimensions" of their nuclear program. If they do obtain nuclear capability, the odds increase that a nuclear exchange will occur, and/or that nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of terrorists. Iran and al-Qaida are rivals but they have cooperated in the past and are likely to do so against common enemies again. By now we get that, right?

In New Hampshire last week, Vice President Joseph Biden called those fighting for the Islamic State "barbarians," melodramatically adding that the Obama administration will "follow them to the gates of hell until they are brought to justice, because hell is where they will reside."

But the very same day, Secretary of State John Kerry chose to change the subject, making the bizarre suggestion that it is America's religious "duty" to confront climate change -- which he has previously called "the biggest challenge of all that we face right now -- not least because "Muslim-majority countries are among the most vulnerable."

Coincidentally, this also was the week that Matt Ridley, a science journalist and member of the British House of Lords, pointed out that "the climate-research

establishment has finally admitted openly what skeptic scientists have been saying for nearly a decade: Global warming has stopped since shortly before this century began."

That does not imply climate change is not a concern; it does imply it is not our "biggest challenge." How inconvenient for the many politicians who would rather fight carbon emissions than jihadis, who are more concerned about you and me driving SUVs than Iranian mullahs spinning centrifuges.

For such politicians, required reading ought to include Brookings senior fellow Robert Kagan's most recent essay on the West's disconcerting return to "the realism of the 1930s." The fundamental grievance of the illiberal and atavistic forces on the march back then, he observes, was no different from that of illiberal and atavistic forces on the march now: "Being forced to live in a world shaped by others."

Thirteen years after 9/11, the world shaped by Judeo-Christian values and the Enlightenment is undeniably imperfect. But are we willing to let al-Qaida, the Islamic State, the Islamic Republic and the Muslim Brotherhood restructure it for our children?

The jihadis want the job. And they are more passionate about their beliefs than most of us, more willing -- even eager -- to kill and be killed to spread them. Thirteen years after 9/11, it's probably time to decide whether we're capable of a serious response.

Clifford D. May is president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on national security, and a foreign affairs columnist for The Washington Times.

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

Following the last two Parshios that focused on Justice and the value of individual rights, Moshe directed the nation's attention to the realities of what it meant to live in Eretz Yisroel.

Our behaviors, as well as natural law, are subject to the word of G-d and interface with each other in the most intimate example of cause and effect. As the Chosen People, our lifestyle should manifest the ever-present mastery of the Creator over mankind and the realization of the connection between our adherence of Mitzvot and the laws of nature. This is most apparent in Eretz Yisroel. As Moshe told the Bnai Yisroel in Parshas Ekev, (11:12) "It is therefore a land constantly under Hashem's scrutiny..." As clearly as the rain and dew fall, the land reflects G-d's presence. Keeping the mitzvot of the Torah

proclaims in word and deed G-d's mastery over man and results in nature serving man as her accepted master. By ignoring or opposing the Torah we deny G-d's mastery over man; and in turn, nature opposes man's attempts at mastery over the natural world.

During the 40 years of the desert, the Jews were being prepared to accept the reality of Hashem's mastery and the responsibility of keeping His mitzvot. Now, in Parshas Ki Savoe, as they were poised to cross the Yarden and assume their intended place as "... highest of all the nations on earth." (28:1) Moshe commanded a number of declarations and ceremonies. These ceremonies would underscore the cause and effect relationship that exists between adherence to Torah, the laws of nature, and the divine responsiveness of the land.

1st & 2nd Aliyot: The Parsha begins with the Mitzvot of the first fruits and the completion of the Tithing cycles. Both are accompanied by special declarations of Hashem's mastery over the land, and man's responsibility to keep the commandments of Hashem.

4th & 5th Aliyot: Moshe presents a statement of allegiance between Hashem and His People. We are to keep the Torah and Hashem guarantees us praise, fame and glory as the "highest of all the nations". (26:19) Upon crossing the Yarden, the Nation will publicly declare its acceptance of Hashem's covenant by: inscribing the Torah upon twelve stones; erecting them as a monument; and the ceremony of blessings and curses that is to take place between the opposing mountains, Grizim and Ayval.

6th Aliya: Commonly known as the Tochacha the admonitions and punishments. It describes the consequences that will befall the Jewish people if they ignore Hashem's Torah and his providence. The custom is for the Reader to read this Aliya more quickly and quietly than the rest of the Parsha.

7th Aliya: The Parsha concludes with the beginning of Moshe's final discourse. He starts by recounting the miraculous nature of the past 40 years and its clear indication of Hashem's ever present protection, past and future.

**Isaiah 60:1-22** - This week's Haftorah of Consolation refocuses us on the messianic vision of a nation and world united behind a single goal and purpose.

"Lift up your eyes round about... they are all gathered together... (60:4) Your gates will be continually open... so that men may bring to you the wealth of nations, with their kings led in procession. (60:11)

Violence will no longer be heard in your land... but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise". (60:18)

As in the times of Yishayuhu, we too are in need of consolation. "Your people will all be righteous; they will possess the land forever... (60:21) May we soon be comforted!

## EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

**“And the nations will see Hashem’s Name called upon you.” (Debarim 28:10)**

We read in the perashah about who we are in the eyes of the nations of the world. Rabbi Dovid Kaplan has an amazing story.

What could be better than venturing out to the jungles of Africa? In the mind of Yotam Dayan, nothing. So the young Israeli, fresh out of the army, packed his stuff and set off on his own in an effort to “get away from it all.”

At one point he rented a jeep and started driving through the villages in the surrounding area. The locals were unbelievably poor, so it was only natural that when he saw a little kid on the side of the road pointing to his mouth in a gesture meaning, “I’m hungry,” he stopped the jeep. He started looking through his backpack to find a candy bar for him. When he looked up again, he saw to his very unpleasant surprise that his jeep was surrounded by about twenty-five unfriendly looking natives. Very unfriendly. Extremely unfriendly.

This was a standard trick employed by the locals. They would send out a pathetic looking kid, the vehicle would stop and then they would rob the driver of all his money, or worse. Usually worse. Yotam had served in one of the elite Israeli army units and was normally fearless. Right now he was scared. Very scared. Extremely scared.

One of the men asked him in broken English where he was from. “Israel,” Yotam answered hesitatingly. And then something totally unexpected happened. The men all slowly backed away from the jeep in what was unmistakably a state of awe, bowed slightly, and started chanting, “You the Chosen Piple. You the Chosen Piple.” They apologized for inconveniencing him and sent him off on his much relieved way.

Upon his return to Israel, Yotam decided to investigate why it is that we’re referred to as the “Chosen Piple.” Predictably, he became a complete Ba’al Teshubah.. Today he learns full time and runs a night Kollel. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and gladness of heart" (Debarim 28:47)**

This pasuk teaches us that serving Hashem without happiness brings punishment to a person. The Arizal says that precisely because the Jewish people worshipped Hashem in an unenthusiastic manner, without excitement, they would ultimately serve their enemies. A major component of serving Hashem is being in a constant state of happiness. In fact, if we had not failed to serve Hashem with joy, we would not have been exiled.

The Yalkut Me'am Loez illustrates this point with a parable. There was once a king whose son was uncontrollable. His constant acts of disrespect and disregard for the law brought great embarrassment to the king. Often, his father would be about to punish him, but at the last minute, the son would put on a sweet angelic smile. When the father saw the happiness and innocence in his son's eyes, he couldn't bring himself to punish his son.

This is a great tool to protect us from punishment. When Hashem sees the joy coming from a person's performance of a misvah, He defers punishment. It is not enough to be intellectually aware of the greatness of the Torah and a Torah life. A person must experience it with joy. If one doesn't see the happiness which Judaism brings upon us, he may eventually turn elsewhere to search for happiness.

Let's take the initiative in these days of Elul, as we approach the High Holidays, to do our misvot with extra excitement and happiness. This will serve us well on Rosh Hashanah when Hashem reviews our deeds for the year. May we all be written in the book of life and happiness, Amen.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

## RABBI ELI MANSOUR Thanking God, Thanking People

Parashat Ki-Tavo begins with the Misva of Bikkurim, the requirement to bring one's first fruits to the Kohen in the Bet Hamikdash. A farmer who grew any of the seven special species would tie a thread around the first fruits that ripened, and then bring them to the Mikdash. Before giving the basket of fruit to the Kohen, the farmer would recite a special declaration, called Mikra Bikkurim, in which he recalled how Laban tried to destroy Yaakov, and how Beneh Yisrael were subjugated in Egypt and were ultimately rescued by God. It is only in the final verse of Mikra Bikkurim that the farmer made mention of the fruits which God had given him.

The question arises, why does the Torah require a farmer to recall the history of Am Yisrael, dating back to the time of Yaakov Abinu? It is understandable

that one should be required to bring a gift and express his gratitude for a successful yield. But why does the Torah require him on this occasion to contemplate the ancient history of the Jewish people?

The answer, it would seem, is that the Torah here seeks to convey an important lesson regarding gratitude. When something good happens to us, we must seize the opportunity to thank Hashem for all that He does for us – and not only for the immediate source of joy, or the success we have just achieved. As the farmer proudly stands in the Temple with the first produce of his field, he must thank God not only for this year's yield, but for everything God has done for him and for the Jewish people, already from the earliest times.

People are not naturally inclined to feel or express gratitude, because feeling grateful means feeling dependant. We want to feel independent and self-sufficient, and thus we naturally seek to avoid feeling indebted. For this reason, the Torah imposed upon the farmer the requirement to thank God for everything, to break this natural tendency and to emphasize the importance of gratitude.

But gratitude to God can only come after one feels gratitude toward other people. I once observed a young married man reciting Birkat Hamazon with intense emotion. When he finally finished his very lengthy and animated recitation, I asked him a simple question: "So, why don't you say, 'Thank you?'"

"What?" the man said. "I just recited Birkat Hamazon; I thanked Hashem."

"Yes, but what about thanking your wife, who prepared and served a nice meal?"

"Thank my wife?!" the man asked. "I just thanked God. Why do I need to thank my wife?"

At that moment, I realized that the man's outward piety was insincere. A person who cannot feel gratitude for something that was done for him right before his eyes cannot possibly feel genuinely grateful to God, whom he does not see. We cannot reach the lofty level of feeling grateful for God for all He does for us until we have achieved the more basic level of recognizing and feeling grateful for the kindness we receive from the people around us. If we fail to show gratitude to a devoted wife, to a hard-working husband, to a loving parent, to a diligent employee, or to helpful neighbors, then how can we possibly show gratitude to God?

The Misva of Bikkurim reminds us of the need to feel genuinely grateful to God for all He has done for us and for our nation since its inception. But we must not forget our more basic responsibility to feel grateful to all those people in our lives who deserve our appreciation. It's easy to say "Thank you" to the supermarket clerk or the mailman, toward whom we don't really feel any true gratitude. But it's more difficult to feel and express gratitude to those who really deserve it, such as our spouses and parents. Let us remember our obligation of "Hakarat Hatob" (gratitude) toward the people in our lives who deserve our appreciation, and we will then be able to feel grateful to the Almighty for all He has done for us.

### Rabbi Wein SOME THOUGHTS FOR ELUL

The month of Elul has always been portrayed as a time of introspection. As we prepare for the coming good and blessed year of 5775, we should also stop to consider the occurrences and events of the past year, 5774. Like most of life, it was a year of contrasts and mixed messages. Israel and the Palestinian Authority negotiated for most of the year but any sort of meaningful agreement failed to appear. The end of the year was marked by a bloody and difficult war in Gaza, the true results of which have yet to become clear and visible.

Even though our coalition government was constantly wracked with inner dissent and public criticism, it somehow was able to maintain itself and provide our country with a modicum of much-needed stability. But the political landscape in Israel is always a bleak one, with the thunderstorm of new elections consistently hovering just over the horizon. All current polls indicate that any new election in the foreseeable future will not really change our current political lineup.

The disagreements and carping will continue but we are so accustomed to that that it really has very little influence on our daily lives. Some of the great corruption trials of Israeli leaders took place last year and showed how far the mighty fell! One hopes that lessons have been learned by those who are now in power. Yet I am not convinced that the old boy mentality that so breeds corruption has been eradicated in our wonderful little country.

We have new Chief Rabbis here in Israel that were elected and installed this past year. The Chief Rabbinate here in Israel is a most vital and powerful institution. Tragically, it has been badly tarnished over the past decade, with many a scandal and even criminal activity associated with it. It should be the



hope of all of us that those newly installed will be successful in rehabilitating the image and operations of the Chief Rabbinate.

At a recent ceremony held here in Jerusalem, over three hundred young men received rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbinate. There is a great deal of talent present in this coming generation of Torah scholars and budding rabbinic leaders. It is my fervent hope that somehow these young men will find positions of spiritual leadership that will satisfy them and thereby enhance the society of Israel.

There is a strong desire amongst the non-observant Jewish society in Israel today to know more about their faith and their history. In short, they may not yet desire to become observant but they have a great desire to become more Jewish. They should be aided in this effort by this new generation of rabbinic leadership. I feel that the non-observant society is not interested in kiruv per se. Many are threatened by the enormous change in lifestyle that they would have to undergo. But Jews in Israel, in the main, want to be more attached to the Jewish story and the Jewish society. I think that it is certainly the obligation of the official rabbinate in Israel to help them achieve this important goal.

The new year is an uncharted mystery to all of us. But whatever it will bring, understanding and appreciating the lessons of the old year will certainly be helpful. This is true on a personal level as well as on the national scene. All of us made mistakes this past year and we pray that the holy day of Yom Kippur will again wipe the slate clean for us. Nevertheless, we should recognize those errors that were made and resolve not to repeat them during the coming year.

We should strengthen family bonds, even with those with whom we may disagree personally or ideologically. We should be much more tolerant of all sections of our society, be less judgmental and refrain from imposing our standards and behavior patterns upon others. At the same time we should strengthen our loyalty to the Torah and to the observance of its commandments.

We should fortify our commitment to Jewish life and the basic norms of Torah morality here in our country. These goals are indeed lofty ones that will occupy much of our time, efforts, talents and resources, in this coming year. We should not shrink from the task. The rabbis in Avot taught us that it is not incumbent upon us to finish the task but neither are we free to abstain from attempting to do so. This should be our guide for the coming good and blessed year.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks A Nation of Storytellers**

Howard Gardner, professor of education and psychology at Harvard University, is one of the great minds of our time. He is best known for his theory of "multiple intelligences," the idea that there is not one thing that can be measured and defined as intelligence but many different things – one dimension of the dignity of difference. He has also written many books on leadership and creativity, including one in particular, *Leading Minds*, that is important in understanding this week's parsha.[1]

Gardner's argument is that what makes a leader is the ability to tell a particular kind of story – one that explains ourselves to ourselves and gives power and resonance to a collective vision. So Churchill told the story of Britain's indomitable courage in the fight for freedom. Gandhi spoke about the dignity of India and non-violent protest. Margaret Thatcher talked about the importance of the individual against an ever-encroaching State. Martin Luther King told of how a great nation is colour-blind. Stories give the group a shared identity and sense of purpose.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has also emphasized the importance of narrative to the moral life. "Man," he writes, "is in his actions and practice as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal." It is through narratives that we begin to learn who we are and how we are called on to behave. "Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words." [2] To know who we are is in large part to understand of which story or stories we are a part.

The great questions – "Who are we?" "Why are we here?" "What is our task?" – are best answered by telling a story. As Barbara Hardy put it: "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative." This is fundamental to understanding why Torah is the kind of book it is: not a theological treatise or a metaphysical system but a series of interlinked stories extended over time, from Abraham and Sarah's journey from Mesopotamia to Moses' and the Israelites' wanderings in the desert. Judaism is less about truth as system than about truth as story. And we are part of that story. That is what it is to be a Jew.

A large part of what Moses is doing in the book of Devarim is retelling that story to the next generation, reminding them of what God had done for their

parents and of some of the mistakes their parents had made. Moses, as well as being the great liberator, is the supreme story teller. Yet what he does in parshat Ki Tavo extends way beyond this.

He tells the people that when they enter, conquer and settle the land, they must bring the first ripened fruits to the central sanctuary, the Temple, as a way of giving thanks to God. A Mishnah in Bikkurim<sup>[3]</sup> describes the joyous scene as people converged on Jerusalem from across the country, bringing their firstfruits to the accompaniment of music and celebration. Merely bringing the fruits, though, was not enough. Each person had to make a declaration. That declaration became one of the best known passages in the Torah because, though it was originally said on Shavuot, the festival of firstfruits, in post-biblical times it became a central element of the Haggadah on seder night:

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt and lived there, few in number, there becoming a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. (Deut. 26: 5-8)

Here for the first time the retelling of the nation's history becomes an obligation for every citizen of the nation. In this act, known as vidui bikkurim, "the confession made over firstfruits," Jews were commanded, as it were, to become a nation of storytellers.

This is a remarkable development. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi tells us that, "Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people."<sup>[4]</sup> Time and again throughout Devarim comes the command to remember: "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt." "Remember what Amalek did to you." "Remember what God did to Miriam." "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you."

The vidui bikkurim is more than this. It is, compressed into the shortest possible space, the entire history of the nation in summary form. In a few short sentences we have here "the patriarchal origins in Mesopotamia, the emergence of the Hebrew nation in the midst of history rather than in mythic prehistory, slavery in Egypt and liberation therefrom,

the climactic acquisition of the land of Israel, and throughout – the acknowledgement of God as lord of history."<sup>[5]</sup>

We should note here an important nuance. Jews were the first people to find God in history. They were the first to think in historical terms – of time as an arena of change as opposed to cyclical time in which the seasons rotate, people are born and die, but nothing really changes. Jews were the first people to write history – many centuries before Herodotus and Thucydides, often wrongly described as the first historians. Yet biblical Hebrew has no word that means "history" (the closest equivalent is *divrei hayamim*, "chronicles"). Instead it uses the root *zakhor*, meaning "memory."

There is a fundamental difference between history and memory. History is "his story,"<sup>[6]</sup> an account of events that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is "my story." It is the past internalised and made part of my identity. That is what the Mishnah in Pesachim means when it says, "Each person must see himself as if he (or she) went out of Egypt."<sup>[7]</sup>

Throughout Devarim Moses warns the people – no less than fourteen times – not to forget. If they forget the past they will lose their identity and sense of direction and disaster will follow. Moreover, not only are the people commanded to remember, they are also commanded to hand that memory on to their children.

This entire phenomenon represents a remarkable cluster of ideas: about identity as a matter of collective memory; about the ritual retelling of the nation's story; above all about the fact that every one of us is a guardian of that story and memory. It is not the leader alone, or some elite, who are trained to recall the past, but every one of us. This too is an aspect of the devolution and democratization of leadership that we find throughout Judaism as a way of life. The great leaders tell the story of the group, but the greatest of leaders, Moses, taught the group to become a nation of storytellers.

You can still see the power of this idea today. As I point out in my book *The Home We Build Together*, if you visit the Presidential memorials in Washington, you see that each carries an inscription taken from their words: Jefferson's 'We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .', Roosevelt's 'The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself', Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his second Inaugural, 'With malice toward none; with charity for all . . .' Each memorial tells a story.

London has no equivalent. It contains many memorials and statues, each with a brief inscription stating who it represents, but there are no speeches or quotations. There is no story. Even the memorial to Churchill, whose speeches rivalled Lincoln's in power, carries only one word: Churchill.

America has a national story because it is a society based on the idea of covenant. Narrative is at the heart of covenantal politics because it locates national identity in a set of historic events. The memory of those events evokes the values for which those who came before us fought and of which we are the guardians.

A covenantal narrative is always inclusive, the property of all its citizens, newcomers as well as the home-born. It says to everyone, regardless of class or creed: this is who we are. It creates a sense of common identity that transcends other identities. That is why, for example, Martin Luther King was able to use it to such effect in some of his greatest speeches. He was telling his fellow African Americans to see themselves as an equal part of the nation. At the same time, he was telling white Americans to honour their commitment to the Declaration of Independence and its statement that 'all men are created equal'.

England does not have the same kind of national narrative because it is based not on covenant but on hierarchy and tradition. England, writes Roger Scruton, "was not a nation or a creed or a language or a state but a home. Things at home don't need an explanation. They are there because they are there." [8] England, historically, was a class-based society in which there were ruling elites who governed on behalf of the nation as a whole. America, founded by Puritans who saw themselves as a new Israel bound by covenant, was not a society of rulers and ruled, but rather one of collective responsibility. Hence the phrase, central to American politics but never used in English politics: "We, the people."

By making the Israelites a nation of storytellers, Moses helped turn them into a people bound by collective responsibility – to one another, to the past and future, and to God. By framing a narrative that successive generations would make their own and teach to their children, Moses turned Jews into a nation of leaders.

[1] Howard Gardner in collaboration with Emma Laskin, *Leading minds: an anatomy of leadership*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

[3] Mishnah Bikkurim ch. 3.

[4] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Schocken, 1989, 9.

[5] Yerushalmi, *ibid.*, 12.

[6] This is a simple reminder not an etymology. *Historia* is a Greek word meaning inquiry. The same word comes to mean, in Latin, a narrative of past events.

[7] Mishnah Pesachim 10: 5.

[8] Roger Scruton, *England, an Elegy*, Continuum, 2006, 16.

## OUR PREPARATION FOR ROSH HASHANAH Aram Soba Newsletter

We have a tradition from our ancestors that the weekly parashah and its latent messages relate and are integrally connected to the time of year during which the parashah is read. Already the Gemara notes the relationship between the "tochahah," the collection of unspeakable curses that will befall Benei Yisrael, Heaven forbid, upon their neglect of the Torah, found in our parashah, to the time of period when it is read - the end of the year. By reading this parashah specifically during this period, we express our hope that "the year shall end together with its curses; the year shall begin together with its blessings." But the beginning of the parashah, too, relates directly to this period, two weeks before Rosh Hashanah, right in the middle of the month of mercy and Selihot, in the height of our preparations for the Day of Judgment.

The parashah opens with the mitzvah of bikkurim. The farmer walks into his field, sees that the first fig or grape has ripened, and ties a string around the fruit, indicating that it is the first. No matter where he lives, no matter how difficult a trip it may be, he makes his way to Yerushalayim where he undergoes the process of purification from his state of "tum'ah" and ascends to Har Habayit with songs and praises. He brings the fruits to the kohen and declares emotionally, "I have come here today to Hashem your God," as Rashi explains, "and I am not ungrateful."

Hashem has given me a field, He has blessed me with trees, He has produced fruits therein - I am not ungrateful!

Perhaps the primary "hiddush" of this parashah is that mere verbal expression of gratitude does not suffice. It is not sufficient merely to feel appreciation and say, "Thank you." One's sense of appreciation must yield action. But not just small, simple actions. The farmer takes his choicest fruits, travels to the Holy City and arrives in the Bet Hamikdash with a decorative basket filled with fruits and lifts it up on the mizbei'ah. He then must recite the declaration of "mikra bikkurim" and bequeath the fruits to the kohen.

Anything less than this reflects a certain deficiency in the individual's sense of gratitude towards the Almighty. Failure to fully comply with this procedure indicates that his appreciation is shallow, not deep-rooted, and insincere.

Four hundred and thirty years ago, a family migrated from Yemen to Eress Yisrael, where they underwent the grueling process of absorption. The parents soon passed away, leaving behind a penniless orphan named Yeshuah. Out of poverty and solitude, he was compelled to sleep out in the field and live off the wild vegetation and whatever scraps of food he could find. Eventually, the mercy of a certain man was aroused towards the boy, and he adopted him. The new parents supported the young man, thereby allowing him to devote his time and energy to diligent Torah study, and he studied under Rabbi Besalel Ashkenazi zsl, author of the "Shitah Mekubesset," and Rabbi Hayyim Vital zsl. The boy grew and ultimately emerged as one of the Torah giants of his generation. His benefactor, by contrast, did not study and had difficulty even with mishnayot. As an expression of gratitude, Rabbi Yeshuah sat and composed for his adopter an encompassing work on the mishnayot. He thus benefited all of Am Yisrael with his great commentary on the mishnayot, "Melechet Shelomoh."

This is how one expresses gratitude!

If only we could impress this message upon our hearts, if only we were infused with this recognition of the obligation of gratitude, how much different would our lives be, how much more fulfilling and enriching! Children would recognize the endless sense of gratitude owed to their parents who gave them their very lives, who raised them with such devotion and immense love, who gave them everything - a home, clothing, food, etc. And the parents, in turn, would recognize their debt of gratitude towards their children. After all, it is they who bring joy and excitement into the home. How lonely would the house be without them! Not to mention the feeling of gratitude towards one's spouse. Hazal teach us, "One who opens the door to his friend - he owes him his life!" And, as we know, "It is not good for man to be alone," in lonely solitude and isolation. Given that everyone is but "half a person," supplemented by his spouse, how much gratitude is owed between husband and wife, how much must one appreciate his spouse, with whom he builds his family nest. And, as we noted, feelings and emotion are just not enough. One's sense of appreciation must find expression in the form of action towards the other, in clear demonstration of gratitude and valuation. If we would conduct

ourselves in this manner, the family unit would be ever more stable, there would be no disunity and contention within the home, and certainly there would be no divorce.

Taking this one step further, if the entire procedure described in our parashah comprises the necessary mode of expression for first-fruits, then we can only imagine how much is required to sufficiently express our appreciation for our lives and health. Once again, we must recognize that expression of gratitude must take the form of concrete action so as to entrench it in the soul and have it flow from the heart. If we would only think along these lines, if we could understand that we must "bring bikkurim" not only for fruits but for our very lives, if we would allocate, as it were, to Hashem an hour a day, an hour of public prayer, an hour of Torah study, of listening to a Torah class and performance of kindness towards each other!

The Almighty provides us with a livelihood, he supplies us with food, clothing and all our needs. The concept of gratitude obligates us to express our appreciation through concrete action, to "bring bikkurim" from our resources, to give ssedakah and involve ourselves in kindness, to support those in need and Torah institutions.

If we take advantage of these next two weeks to entrench within us a genuine sense of gratitude and commit ourselves to express it properly, then this constitutes the best means of preparation for Rosh Hashanah.

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