

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

NISABIM-VAYELECH

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 61:10-63:9

SEPTEMBER 15-16, 2017 25 ELUL 5777D

DEDICATION Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther

In memory of Esther Zetooney

And refuah shelema for Eliahu Baraka ben Rachel

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EDITORS NOTES

Why are we inspired by the places we visit?

On Friday night I prayed in a small Synagogue on the second floor of a building which relative to buildings in the land of Israel was really not very old. I was told that the original first floor of the building was initially constructed in the 1870s bridging a gap at the time between Nachalat Shiva and Mea Shearim. At the time the neighborhood area was desolate and rampant with marauders and bandits. Ten homes were built with a surrounding wall which was locked at night. Today this place is less than a block from Jaffa Road, the light rail and one of the busiest tourist areas in Jerusalem. We truly see the prophecy of the return to Zion and rebuilding the land come alive every day when walking these streets.

This second floor was added on in 1922/23 through a donation made by an American philanthropist, Harry Fischel, (see additional article below) who was also the man behind the building of Yeshiva University in America. The newly rebuilt structure would become the home of the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel. Eventually, the Mercaz Harav yeshiva would begin operating there.

I stood in what to me was a small sanctuary with an old ark, a tevah and benches which were a century old, extremely well built (Artistic Frame Quality) but immensely uncomfortable, perhaps to make sure you would never fall asleep during tefilah. There was a photograph on the side, almost a century old showing the entire synagogue or study hall from my perspective but filled with people and with the chief Rabbi, Rav Kook, standing at the front of the room facing the congregation.

I felt this sense of inspiration. I felt a part of history.

Although I am not a Carlebach guy and would rarely opt (if ever, but never say never) for a two hour Carlebach Friday night with soulful singing and

dancing, it was inspiring to watch the mix of people from so many places and communities who formed this small congregation. I was told that half were regulars and half were tourists, but they were all so enthused, moved and lifted by their tefilot. They were also very welcoming. You should definitely consider this in your Friday night Israel plans.

I returned the next morning after praying early in a nearby Sephardic synagogue to join them again as they took out the Torah and was honored to assist in naming my new granddaughter, Sarah Shulamit – Choux Choux. My son in law Daniel and my daughter Mikhayla live next door. Daniel is the gabbay. At the Kiddush, I complimented the congregation on their commitment to Rav Kook's memory and his teachings and in keeping this place alive with Torah and Tefilah. At Seudah Shelishi, I was honored to give a fairly deep but very well received class on understanding the bikurim as a tikun of our experience in Sedom and as it related to welcoming guests and doing chesed and charity. This community certainly made me and everyone who entered feel welcome which is not always the case in Israel. I was flattered to be offered an honorary rabbinical position in the synagogue, but I am sure that offer was made not for my sake, but truly was in appreciation of what Daniel, Mikhayla and my wife Chantelle have done there. (Until visiting again myself I wasn't sure what excited my wife over this place so much).

There is something about a small congregation which allows each member to shine as a separate facet of a jewel. When you have hundreds of facets, it's hard to appreciate any single one, but with only a few, each has its particular beauty. There's the scholar, the singer, the comedian, the dancer, the reminder and even the sleeper. One person you'll need to meet is Yitzhaq, an amazing Torah teacher who sort of runs the place. He gave us a brief but wonderful tour of the museum. He also read us one of the Rabbi's poems. He truly brought it to life and turned the poem into a heart penetrating song. I suggested he do a YouTube series and was surprised to find this link when searching. Take a few minutes to meet Yitzhaq on line and get your own tour. He is a fascinating man.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpp4Ju0slvk>

Yishak enlightened all of us and surprised all of us when he explained that this little girl Sarah Shulamit – Choux Choux, born on the 16th of the month of Elul, living on Rav Kook street overlooking the Bet HaRav shared a birthday with Rav Kook himself. May Hashem bless her to do misvot and chesed and raise a beautiful family among the Jewish people!

I offer you a suggestion. When in Israel, be sure to schedule a visit to Bet HaRav. Don't just do a tour, pray there, learn there, donate a seudah there and support them. They are located at 9 HaRav Kook right off Yafo.

A final thought. Before naming the baby, they honored me with an aliyah for Mashlim with the kaddish. I was saying Kaddish that Shabbat for my great grandfather Yosef ben Ovadia Nakash Bibi. After the Kaddish, I recited a hashkava – the memorial prayer - for a man whose picture I see every day in my office and who really was the start for all we have been able to become in America and contemplated that he passed away in 1927, and here we are 90 years later, remembering him and being inspired by him (some of his life story is brought in the book Nouri published by AtScroll). I wondered if in his travels on behalf of the Sassoon family from Baghdad to Bombay, to Damascus and Europe allowed him a visit to the Holy Land and Jerusalem. It is certainly conceivable that he passed through or was very close and we know he most likely traveled either through the port of Beirut down through the Suez Canal or perhaps by rail to Egypt and then onward. I wondered as I walked the streets of Jerusalem, the alleys of the old city and stood that Shabbat to pray mincha at the Kotel – The Wall - if my great grandfather had walked these very steps. It was certainly possible I concluded, although most likely difficult and dangerous. How much do we have to be thankful and appreciative of the opportunities afforded us and be sure to take advantage?

We read this week, Atem Nesavim After all the 98 curses, Moses reminds us and we must remind ourselves that 2700 years after the first exile and 1950 years after the second one, we too are still standing. But standing alone is not enough. We have a double portion and the second is Vayelech – we too need to go forward.

I bless you all to go forward into a year of health, happiness, peace and prosperity.

Shabbat Shalom and Tizku LeShanim Rabot

David Bibi

If you desire, human being, look at the light of God's Presence in everything.

Look at the Eden of spiritual life, at how it blazes into each corner and crevice of life, spiritual and of this world, right before your eyes of flesh and your eyes of soul....

Gaze at the wonders of creation, at their divine life— not like some dim phenomenon that is placed before your eyes from afar.

But know the reality in which you live.

Know yourself and your world.

Know the thoughts of your heart, and of all who speak and think.

Find the source of life inside you, higher than you, around you. [Find] the beautiful ones alive in this generation in whose midst you are immersed.

The love within you: lift it up to its mighty root, to its beauty of Eden.

Send it spreading out to the entire flood of the soul of the Life of worlds, Whose light is reduced only by incapable human expression.

Gaze at the lights, at what they contain.

Do not let the Names, phrases and letters swallow up your soul.

They have been given over to you.

You have not been given over to them.

Rise up.

Rise up, for you have the power.

You have wings of the spirit, wings of powerful eagles.

Do not deny them, or they will deny you.

Seek them, and you will find them instantly.

Rav Kook - Orot Hakodesh I, pp. 83-84

The Unlikely Origin Of Beit HaRav Kook Rabbi Aaron I. Reichel – The Jewish Press 25 Adar II 5771 – March 30, 2011

In the days when Eretz Yisrael was known as Palestine and ruled by the British, the consensus was that the British wanted the Jews to have a homeland but only as a continuing colony under British rule. Eventually, Menachem Begin and the Irgun led a revolt (for which the Haganah got much of the credit, but this is a story for another day), leading to the creation of the independent state of Israel.

Here's the shocker: The idea to build a special house for the chief rabbi of Palestine came from none other than his excellency, the high commissioner of Palestine, representing the British government – Sir Herbert Samuel.

Here's how it came about and was implemented, as recounted primarily by Harry Fischel through his son-in-law, Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, in the biography

referred to above. Fischel is the person who arranged for the house to be built, entirely at his own personal expense.

On Fischel's second trip to Palestine, in 1921, a military officer of the British government presented him with an invitation to call upon the high commissioner. Fischel was warned by Herbert Samuel's secretary that Samuel normally limited his meetings to 20 minutes, during which Fischel planned to discuss how he could help in the building of the Jewish homeland.

During the hour and three-quarters of their conference, covering many subjects, Samuels pointed out to Fischel, in the words of Fischel's biographer, that "whereas the chief representatives of other religions in the city of Jerusalem each occupied a suitable residence, Rabbi Kook was compelled to live on the second floor of an old and dilapidated building where the proper reception to visitors was impossible. He stated that this residence ill-befitted the dignity of the high office of the chief rabbi of Palestine," and advised Fischel to try to convince a few wealthy Americans to build a more suitable home for the chief rabbi.

Before the day was over, Fischel had decided not only to build a home for the chief rabbi, but a synagogue (to be used as a yeshiva) as well, entirely at his own expense. The chief rabbi at first declined the generous offer, but then was persuaded to accept the gift not as a personal tribute but as one made in recognition of his office.

Upon its completion the building was described in The New York Times as "a monument to Jerusalem, located on the [then] principal square at the intersection of three streets of Moorish design, built of stone . It is probably the only house in the city having every modern convenience, and besides living rooms, it also contains a large meeting room and a synagogue " The latter was used as the yeshiva until the current yeshiva building was built for what has come to be known as Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav, with a wing dedicated by the Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation.

The day of the dedication of the building "was regarded as a national holiday . The whole City of Jerusalem was decorated for the occasion . In practically every window appeared the Zionist flag, that was merged in the decorations with the American colors."

Participants at the dedication itself included both chief rabbis, the high commissioner, consular

officials, the acting governor of Jerusalem, the mayor of Jerusalem, Dr. Judah Magnes, and many rabbis, including Fischel's son-in-law, Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, then president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Thousands of people stood outside in the streets, kept in order by military officers.

An official government reporter recounted: "The ceremony was a most brilliant event and will remain a red letter day in the annals of Jerusalem . There were present the elite of the Jewish and non-Jewish communities . On the wall facing the gathering there were hung two pictures, one of King George V, and the other of the High Commissioner."

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

I heard a great Rosh Hashana class from Rabbi Yedid which I wanted to share. The main idea of Rosh Hashana is "Hashem is the king". We are crowning Hashem. How do we make Hashem the king? How do we exercise this in practice? By crowning the people around us. Man was created in the image of Hashem. When we give honor to the people who were created in Hashem's image we are giving honor to Hashem. Hazal tell us one of the questions they will ask us when we get to shamayim is "himlachta eht haverecha" (did you make your friend a king over you)?

And the people we have the most trouble crowning are the people we are closest to. It's easy to be nice to someone you don't know or someone you feel the need to give respect to (like your customer or your boss). But for some reason when it comes to our family (our spouse and children) or our employees we find that we slip more often. We would never slip up and scream at the Walmart buyer. It would ever happen. Not once. But by our family we slip consistently. Why? Because in our house Hashem is not king. I am king. When we get angry we are saying I am the king. I am in charge and people should listen to me. And if I am the king that means Hashem is not.

The avoda of Rosh Hashana is to remember that Hashem is the king. To crown our family. Crown our wives. Treat them with respect. Make them feel special. Compliment them. Don't get upset if they didn't do something you asked them to do. If you are upset at least express it in a respectful tone. Talk to our children with a little more patience. They are our children not our slaves. Just because we asked them to do something and they didn't do it doesn't mean we can scream at them. Let us accept upon

ourselves from now until after Yom Kippur not to let ourselves get angry and with this we can truly crown Hashem! Tizku le'shanim Rabot!

Nitsavim- Teshuva and Benei Israel seals a covenant with Hashem

- 1- Moshe gathers Benei Israel on the day of his death to enter a covenant with Hashem
- 2- The purpose of the covenant is so we should remain acting like Hashem's nation
- 3- A warning to stay away from avoda zara
- 4- A day will come when we do teshuva and Hashem will gather us and return us to Israel
- 5- Blessings that will come when we do teshuva and return to Hashem
- 6- Hashem reassures us that the Torah is not in the heavens or seas but rather is close and attainable for us to learn
- 7- Hashem again tells Benei Israel that if we follow the mitzvot we will have life and goodness and if we don't there will be death

Va'yelech - Moshe bids farewell. A transition in leadership

- 1- Moshe goes to bid farewell to Benei Israel on the day of his death telling Benei Israel that he cannot come with them into Israel.
- 2- Moshe tells Benei Israel Hashem will help them triumph over their enemies in Israel.
- 3- Moshe gives Yehoshua hizuk since he will now lead Benei Israel. Moshe writes down the Torah
- 4- The mitzvah of hakhel (the king reads parts of the Torah in front of the entire nation)
- 5- Hashem tells Yehoshua through Moshe that Benei Israel will sin and Hashem will hide his face. Hashem commands Moshe to write Ha'azinu
- 6- Hashem says Benei Israel will sin and the song of Ha'azinu will stand as witness that Benei Israel were warned of what would happen if they sin. Hashem gives Yehoshua hizuk as leader.
- 7- Moshe gives the Torah to the Leviim and elders. Moshe gathers Benei Israel to tell them the song of Ha'azinu that will be read in the next parasha.

Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"...that you renew for us a good and sweet year."
(Simanim on Rosh Hashanah)

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to perform a number of simanim, good omens, to augment the coming New Year. The most important siman of them all, though, is not the edible kind, but rather the siman that comes from within each and every one of us. It is, in fact, the most essential of all: being pleasant, optimistic, and

creating a friendly environment. There should be no sharp or hostile comments during this time period, but only a "sweet-as-the-honey-on-the-table" atmosphere (Mishnah Berurah 583:5). In that spirit, family members and guests should all wish each other a good, sweet year as is done in shul.

On the night of Rosh Hashanah, there is a well-known custom to dip a piece of apple into sugar (or honey). The berachah of Boreh Peri Ha'ess is recited, and we add a prayer for a good and sweet year. One might think that the entire exercise is performed in order to stress upon us the "sweetness" of the new year. However, we do not make a berachah on the honey at all. Why? Because the apple is a symbol of life itself, since it comes from a tree, and Torah – our lifeblood – is called ess-hahayim, the tree of life. While we may wish for a life filled with sweetness and happiness, the main object of our prayer is life itself! The berachah of Boreh Peri Ha'ess that is recited indicates the main ingredient, the main focus of our prayers.

We first petition for life itself, reciting the berachah on the apple, and only then do we beg for the "sugar coating," asking for a "good, sweet year."

Happy holiday. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Assemble the people, the men, and the women, and the little ones." (Debarim 31:12)

Rashi explains that although the little children were clearly not capable of comprehending the experience, they accompanied the adults. Thus, those who brought them would be rewarded. In truth, the children that came along probably disrupted the adults to the point that they could not listen as intently as they would have desired. We may, therefore, wonder at the Torah's insistence that the children be present. Would it not have been preferable for the children to remain at home, in order to enable the adults to properly concentrate on their service to Hashem?

Rabbi N. Adler, z"l, suggests that herein lies the actual reward. The adults were implored to "sacrifice" some of their personal spiritual experiences, so that the children would be availed the opportunity to see, hear and experience the sublimity of the moment. Torah education takes precedence over parents' personal needs. Many times, we won't bring our children (the ones who don't run around) to shul, because we want to "relax" and not worry about them. Or we will come home from work, wanting to take it easy, while our children have homework and other needs. This is a point well worth remembering. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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Moshe Rabbenu tells us in Parashat Nisavim (29:28), "Ha'nistarot L'Hashem Elokenu Ve'ha'niglot Lanu U'l'banenu Ad Olam" – "That which is hidden belongs to Hashem our God; but that which is revealed is for us and our children, forever." This verse establishes the concept of collective responsibility toward Torah observance. We committed ourselves to the Torah together as a nation, and not just as individuals. And therefore, we have a responsibility to see to it, as best we can, that all other Jews observe the Misvot. It does not suffice to ensure that we and our families are devoted to the Torah. We must also be concerned that all our fellow Jews are likewise committed. This verse tells us that although we are not responsible for the "Nistarot," for the sins we are not aware of, the "Niglot" – the spiritual ills and failings of which we are aware – are our responsibility to address.

The Hafetz Haim (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) explained this concept through an analogy to a borrower who borrowed a large sum of money and asked a friend to sign as his guarantor. Sometime later, the guarantor sees his friend, the borrower, walking into a casino with a wallet stuffed with money. The guarantor rushes up to him and reprimands him for going gambling.

"What's it to you?" the friend angrily retorts. "It's my money, so I can do what I want with it."

"Oh no," the guarantor replies. "This directly affects me. If you throw your money away, I'm the one who's going to have to come up with a million dollars to repay your loan!"

Similarly, the Hafetz Haim explains, it is very much our business whether our fellow Jews observe the Torah, because we accepted collective responsibility toward it. We all jointly share the consequences of the nation's collective success or, Heaven forbid, failure to observe the Misvot, and we must therefore do what we can to bring back those who have strayed from observance.

Of course, this responsibility gives rise to the question of how this can be done. People don't like being told what to do. It's clear and obvious to everyone that if we go up to non-observant Jews and angrily reprimand them for violating the Torah, this tactic will not succeed. If anything, it will breed

resentment that will further distance these precious Jews from our heritage.

The solution is to affect people without saying a word, to show them the beauty of Misvot and the satisfaction they bring without talking about it. When we see, for example, a great Torah Sage poring over his Torah books with passion and excitement, we are inspired. And even the rest of us can inspire people by performing Misvot with fervor and enthusiasm. If people see us feeling happy and fulfilled for having chosen a Torah lifestyle, they might be open to the idea of trying it out. If we have non-observant guests for Shabbat meal and they see and feel the special joy of a family sitting together, sharing ideas and singing Pizmonim, this will have an effect. But if people see us performing Misvot begrudgingly, complaining about the responsibilities and rushing through them as fast as we can, they will remain distant from Torah life, and will in fact be happy that they do not embrace our lifestyle.

We do not have to – and we should not – go over to our fellow Jews and tell them directly they must be observing the Torah. But what we can and must do is reach out to them automatically, by default, exuding joy and fulfillment in our performance of Misvot, and making it clear that we view Torah life as a great privilege and source of unparalleled satisfaction.

VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA

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What is Rosh Hashanah All About?
Rabbi Meyer Laniado

Every year during Elul, I ask myself the same question, what is Rosh Hashanah all about? The references to Rosh Hashanah in the Torah and the Mishnah are rare and vague. They seem to offer a variety of messages, and it is very difficult to pinpoint one unique theme that encompasses them all. However, while it is difficult to find commonality within the references in the Torah or Mishnah, there is a message that comes out from understanding each of these elements and how they each contribute towards the meaning of the holiday. Rosh Hashanah is precisely that one day a year when we should take a step back to gain perspective on our purpose in this world. It is the day where we can evaluate where our lives are headed. We can then decide if we want to take the time to understand what our purpose is, and if we want, choose to change our behavior to live a meaningful and fulfilled life. That is the message of

Rosh Hashanah that each of these elements contributes to.

The Torah refers to the holiday in two ways, firstly as זָכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה [1] (remembering the loud noise/outcry/trumpet call), and secondly as יוֹם תְּרוּעָה [2] (A day of loud noise/outcry/trumpet call). Looking to the Mishnah, we find two more articulations, one being, רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה [3] (First of the year) and the other יוֹם הַדִּין [4] (Day of Judgement/Evaluation/Accounting). From all of the above references to the holiday of Rosh Hashana, we have the famous four names: יוֹם תְּרוּעָה from the Torah, and יוֹם הַדִּין and רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה from the Mishnah. Thus, what is the difference between these references and what is the message that the Torah is trying to portray to us?

Interestingly, none of the references for the holiday are truly unique to the holiday itself. תְּרוּעָה, used in both the Torah's references, is seen in a wide range of usages and by itself does not seem to indicate a special message for the holiday. תְּרוּעָה is found relating to other holidays[5], the camp of Israel moving[6], the announcement of the Jubilee[7] year, war,[8] and many others. Although we may think of the שׁוֹפָר as something unique to Rosh Hashanah, it is not. It is the instrument mostly used to create a תְּרוּעָה [9] and/or Teqiah[10] in instances not unique to Rosh Hashanah as seen listed above. Similarly, רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה and יוֹם הַדִּין, the other two names for the holiday, mentioned in the Mishnah, are not unique to the holiday either[11].

However, while the references to the holiday are not unique to just Rosh Hashanah, each of the individual names identifies a particular aspect of the holiday. The name יוֹם הַדִּין, The Day of Judgment, denotes the evaluation and consideration of evidence, such as the evaluation of our current actions and behaviors. We need to assess whether our actions are aligned with our vision. To do this, we need to know where it is we are supposed to be heading. As the saying goes "if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there."

Our purpose, where we should be headed in life, is referenced with the holiday identification of זָכְרוֹן. יוֹם זָכְרוֹן, The Day of Remembering, is the day that God "remembers[12]" the ברית he made with us. As a Jew, our purpose is in fulfillment of the ברית [13] (agreement/contract), for us to be his people and for Him to be our God[14], specifically our unique role as יוֹם זָכְרוֹן מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ (ministers/priests). יוֹם זָכְרוֹן reminds us of the ברית and our responsibilities as such. Fulfilling the ברית is our vision, and our purpose in life.

Through our acknowledgment of the ברית and our active role as God's ministers, God is enthroned as our king. Thus it is obvious, that by following God's misvot, we set him up as our leader and ourselves as his people. The name of Rosh Hashanah, יוֹם תְּרוּעָה, signifies this enthroning, the announcement of God's presence, and our praise of God[15]. יוֹם תְּרוּעָה also signifies a call to do teshubah and return to the right path[16].

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of a new year, it is that time of year where we have the opportunity to evaluate our actions and revisit our mission and purpose, with the goal of realigning our actions with our vision. Well-run companies make sure to set aside time every year to reread their vision statement and evaluate whether or not they are on the right track. As a nation, and as individuals, we have the same opportunity to evaluate whether or not our daily actions are taking us closer towards our purpose in life, and if not, this is our opportunity to return back to the right path.

Rosh Hashanah is our chance to break our bad patterns of behavior and change our outcome for the year. Rosh Hashanah is also the day of judgment in which we are judged on this single day for all of the actions we have committed all year. Yet, how can we be judged for all of our actions on one single day? [17] The answer as I see it is simple, once we are in a cycle, a pattern of behavior, it is very hard to change our ways and we will continue on the same path. Thus, the assumption is that we will continue to do the same, good and bad, that we are doing today for the year to come.

Rosh Hashanah is a time to stop moving from one thing to the next, doing, going and moving very fast. Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of a new year, it is the chance to evaluate our actions and assess whether or not they are taking us closer towards our goal. The misvot were given to us to steer us towards living a viable, sustainable, productive and purposeful life. Now is our chance to evaluate our lives and see if we have chosen the path of life,[18] and if not, to realign our actions. We need to make sure that we don't get caught up in activities that are counterproductive and self-destructive.

The way to take control of our lives, and live a life of meaning and purpose, is to first take account of our current actions, Yom Hadin, and then gain perspective of our purpose, Yom Hazikaron, and Yom Teruah. When better to do this than on Rosh Hashanah?

The question we need to ask ourselves on these days is where will our life take us with our current

choices and what choices can we make to create the outcome we really want. How can we be sure to have a life engaged directly with existence and reality? Rosh Hashanah allows us to do this by reflecting on our purpose, our vision as a Jewish nation and as individuals. Our vision as the Jewish nation is to be a “kingdom of priests and a distinguished nation,” through following God’s instructions[19]. This vision should guide our daily lives and actions. Now is our chance to start afresh, and have a Rosh Hashanah, a new year, one in which we live a life of purpose and meaning.

- [1] Vayiqra 23:24
 [2] Bamidbar 29:1
 [3] Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1
 [4] Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:2
 [5] Bamidbar 10:10
 [6] Bamidbar 10:1-9
 [7] Vayiqra 25:9
 [8] Bamidbar 31:6
 [9] Vayiqra 25:9
 [10] Sifrei Bamidbar 10 defines בְּהַצְדָּקָה as רְפוּשׁ
 [11] Rosh Hashanah for 1. Kings and Festivals 2. Animal Tithes 3. Years, Sabbatical, Jubilee 4. Trees
 Judgement Days 1. Grains 2. Fruits 3. People 4. Water
 [12] Rashi: Aqedat Yishaq, Rashbam: Yisrael (Har Sinai)
 [13] Shemot 19:5-6
 [14] Beresheit 17:7, Debarim 26:17 as well as references to “יָנֵא” מִכִּי הוֹלֵא הוֹדִי” such as is Vayiqra 19
 [15] Psalms 47:6-7; 98:6, Shemot 19:19, Dibrei Hayamim 1 15:28 (the Aron signifies God’s presence), Melachim 1 1:34
 [16] Yeshaya 58
 [17] Rosh Hashana 8a “Meresheit Hashanah etc.”
 [18] Debarim 30:15-20
 [19] Shemot 19:5-6

Rabbi Wein

Ah! The covenant once more. The basis of the relationship between the Jewish people and their Creator is the covenant that exists between them. The covenant is central to the story of the Jewish people. Our father Avraham entered into and created the terms of this eternal covenant. The covenant was embodied in his flesh itself and sanctified by the sense of sacrifice that the historical narrative of Avraham and Yitzchak reinforced.

Yaakov received the covenant from his father – after contests with Eisav and Lavan and bequeathed it to his sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. His family took the covenant with them down to Egypt and it was miraculously preserved throughout centuries of slavery. Yosef had promised them redemption and belief in the existence and efficacy of the covenant. And that promise of redemption for all ages and

future conditions was attached to the overriding theme of the covenant.

To this historical and faith narrative was added the holy spirituality and Divine laws of the Torah granted at Mount Sinai. This combination of holiness, the discipline of behavior, the historical narrative of tradition and family, all combined to form the foundation of the covenant.

This has remained the great backbone of Jewish survival during our long and painful exile and dispersion. It is this covenant that unites Jews the world over as a family, not only as a faith and not only as a nationality.

The continuity and presence of this covenant – alive and well as it assuredly is in our time now – was and is the leitmotif of the rhythms of Jewish life everywhere. The covenant was binding upon all Jews even though many Jews, especially in modern times, were completely unaware of its existence and the grip it exerted on their lives and society.

It is this covenant that governs Jewish history and our current events as well. There is no other rational way to look at our story, past, present and undoubtedly future, in the absence of the overriding influence and presence of the covenant that Moshe and Israel entered into as recorded in this week’s Torah reading.

The demands of the covenant are strong and oftentimes appear to be severe. But an “easy” covenant would be useless considering the challenges and rigors of Jewish history. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein often stated: “People say it is difficult to be a Jew and they are correct in that assessment. But I say that it is even more difficult for a Jew not to be a Jew!” Such is the nature of God’s covenant with us and it has proven to be eternal and binding for all of the millennia of Jewish existence. That is why this is the final major public act of the career of Moshe as the leader of the Jewish people. As long as the covenant holds, he is assured of the eternity of Israel and his own immortality.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Why Be Jewish?

In the last days of his life Moses renews the covenant between God and Israel. The entire book of Devarim has been an account of the covenant – how it came about, what its terms and conditions are, why it is the core of Israel’s identity as an am kadosh, a holy people, and so on. Now comes the moment of renewal itself, a kind of national referendum as it

were.

Moses, however, is careful not to limit his words to those who are actually present. About to die, he wants to ensure that no future generation can say, "Moses made a covenant with our ancestors but not with us. We didn't give our consent. We are not bound." To preclude this he says these words:

"It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today." (Deut. 29:13-14)

As the commentators point out, the phrase "whoever is not here" cannot refer to Israelites alive at the time who happened to be somewhere else. That cannot be since the entire nation was assembled there. It can only mean "generations not yet born." The covenant bound all Jews from that day to this. As the Talmud says: we are all *mushba ve-omed me-har Sinai*, foresworn from Sinai (Yoma 73b, Nedarim 8a). By agreeing to be God's people, subject to God's laws, our ancestors obligated us.

Hence one of the most fundamental facts about Judaism. Converts excepted, we do not choose to be Jews. We are born as Jews. We become legal adults, subject to the commands and responsible for our actions, at the age of twelve for girls, thirteen for boys. But we are part of the covenant from birth. A *bat* or *bar mitzvah* is not a "confirmation." It involves no voluntary acceptance of Jewish identity. That choice took place more than three thousand years ago when Moses said "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with ... whoever is not here with us today," meaning all future generations including us.

But how can this be so? Surely a fundamental principle of Judaism is that there is no obligation without consent. How can we be bound by an agreement to which we were not parties? How can we be subject to a covenant on the basis of a decision taken long ago and far away by our distant ancestors?

The sages, after all, raised a similar question about the wilderness generation in the days of Moses who were actually there and did give their assent. The Talmud suggests that they were not entirely free to say No. "The Holy One blessed be He suspended the mountain over them like a barrel and said: If you say Yes, all will be well, but if you say No, this will be your burial-place" (Shabbat 88b). On this, R. Acha bar Yaakov said: "This constitutes a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of the covenant." The

Talmud replies that even though the agreement may not have been entirely free at the time, Jews asserted their consent voluntarily in the days of Ahasuerus, as suggested by the book of Esther.

This is not the place to discuss this particular passage, but the essential point is clear. The sages believed with great force that an agreement must be free to be binding. Yet we did not agree to be Jews. We were, most of us, born Jews. We were not there in Moses' day when the agreement was made. We did not yet exist. How then can we be bound by the covenant?

This is not a small question. It is the question on which all others turn. How can Jewish identity be passed on from parent to child? If Jewish identity were merely racial or ethnic, we could understand it. We inherit many things from our parents – most obviously our genes. But being Jewish is not a genetic condition, it is a set of religious obligations. There is a halakhic principle, *zakhin le-adam shelo be-fanav*: "You can confer a benefit on someone else without their knowledge or consent." And though it is doubtless a benefit to be a Jew, it is also in some sense a liability, a restriction on our range of legitimate choices. Had we not been Jewish, we could have worked on Shabbat, eaten non-kosher food, and so on. You can confer a benefit, but not a liability, on someone without their consent.

In short, this is the question of questions of Jewish identity. How can we be bound by Jewish law, without our choice, merely because our ancestors agreed on our behalf?

In my book *Radical Then, Radical Now* (published in America as *A Letter in the Scroll*) I pointed out how fascinating it is to trace exactly when and where this question was asked. Despite the fact that everything else depends on it, it was not asked often. For the most part, Jews did not ask the question, 'Why be Jewish?' The answer was obvious. My parents are Jewish. My grandparents were Jewish. So I am Jewish. Identity is something most people in most ages take for granted.

It did, however, become an issue during the Babylonian exile. The prophet Ezekiel says, "What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'" (Ez. 20:32). This is the first reference to Jews actively seeking to abandon their identity.

It happened again in rabbinic times. We know that in the second century BCE there were Jews who

Hellenised, seeking to become Greek rather than Jewish. There were others who, under Roman rule, sought to become Roman. Some even underwent an operation known as epispasm to reverse the effects of circumcision (in Hebrew they were known as meshukhim) to hide the fact that they were Jews.[1]

The third time was in Spain in the fifteenth century. That is where we find two Bible commentators, R. Isaac Arama and R. Isaac Abarbanel, raising precisely the question we have raised about how the covenant can bind Jews today. The reason they ask it while earlier commentators did not was that in their time – between 1391 and 1492 – there was immense pressure on Spanish Jews to convert to Christianity, and as many as a third may have done so (they were known in Hebrew as the anusim, in Spanish as the conversos, and derogatively as marranos, “swine”). The question “Why stay Jewish?” was real.

The answers given were different at different times. Ezekiel’s answer was blunt: “As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you.” In other words, Jews might try to escape their destiny but they will fail. Even against their will they would be known as Jews. That, tragically, is what happened during the two great ages of assimilation, fifteenth century Spain and nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. In both cases, racial antisemitism persisted, and Jews continued to be persecuted.

The sages answered the question mystically. They said, even the souls of Jews not yet born were present at Sinai and ratified the covenant (Exodus Rabbah 28:6). Every Jew, in other words, did give his or her consent in the days of Moses even though they had not yet been born. Demystifying this, perhaps the sages meant that in his or her innermost heart even the most assimilated Jew knew that he or she was still a Jew. That seems to have been the case with figures like Heinrich Heine and Benjamin Disraeli, who lived as Christians but often wrote and thought as Jews.

The fifteenth century Spanish commentators found this answer problematic. As Arama said, we are each of us both body and soul. How then is it sufficient to say that our soul was present at Sinai? How can the soul obligate the body? Of course the soul agrees to the covenant. Spiritually, to be a Jew is a privilege, and you can confer a privilege on someone without their consent. But for the body, the covenant is a burden. It involves all sorts of restrictions on physical pleasures. Therefore if the souls of future generations were present but not their bodies, this would not

constitute consent.

Radical Then, Radical Now is my answer to this question. But perhaps there is a simpler one. Not every obligation that binds us is one to which we have freely given our assent. There are obligations that come with birth. The classic example is a crown prince. To be the heir to a throne involves a set of duties and a life of service to others. It is possible to neglect these duties. In extreme circumstances it is even possible for a monarch to abdicate. But no one chooses to be heir to a throne. That is a fate, a destiny, that comes with birth.

The people of whom God himself said, “My child, my firstborn, Israel” (Ex. 4:22) knows itself to be royalty. That may be a privilege. It may be a burden. It may be both. It is a peculiar post-Enlightenment delusion to think that the only significant things about us are those we choose. For the truth is some of the most important facts about us, we did not choose. We did not choose to be born. We did not choose our parents. We did not choose the time and place of our birth. Yet each of these affects who we are and what we are called on to do.

We are part of a story that began long before we were born and will continue long after we are no longer here, and the question for all of us is: will we continue the story? The hopes of a hundred generations of our ancestors rest on our willingness to do so. Deep in our collective memory the words of Moses continue to resonate. “It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with ... whoever is not here with us today.” We are part of that story. We can live it. We can abandon it. But it is a choice we cannot avoid and it has immense consequences. The future of the covenant rests with us.

[1] This is what R. Elazar of Modiin means when he refers to one who “nullifies the covenant of our father Abraham”, Avot 3:15.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

Preparing For Yom Hadeen/Rosh Hashana

The main Avoda of the Judgement Day is focusing on "Hashem Melech", The King. That Hashem created the universe & He runs it all. He is the only one that has any power & only He can do anything for us.

EMUNAH is what we are working on gaining clarity for Rosh Hashana.

Rambam: "I am Hashem your G-d"(10 Commandments"), this is the Mitzvah to gain Awareness & Belief in Hashem.

This is most fundamental & supercedes even admitting our sins (which we don't do today) in front of the Heavenly court.

The great Purpose in life, to constantly improve, is something that Hashem is urging us and weighing.

"Hashem imparts wisdom to the wise person" (not the jester) because He sees that this wise person will make the best use of this gift. So, we want to put ourselves in this position for the Great Day of Judgment, Yom Hadeen.

"Asher Bara Elokim Laasot", "...That Hashem created to do".

The words 'to do' seem superfluous since it was already stated that "Hashem rested from all of the work that He did".

R' Miller explains that the words "to do" come to teach us the great purpose of life, to be a doer, to make something out of ourselves through constant improvement.

Hashem, our Father, Avinu Malkenu, is waiting on Rosh Hashana to hear our commitment to improve. We can say, "Hashem, we are going to utilize the coming year to love & fear Hashem.

To do everything to serve Hashem.
I am going to make something out of myself".

When Hashem hears our commitment for the New Year, He says: "My child, I see that you are committing to improvement, I commit to giving you another year of life and blessing".

"Hashem imparts wisdom to the wise".

Step 1 to Teshuvah: Realizing how much Hashem has done for you. Step 2: Thanking Him

Workout

"Push! Push! Don't give up!" The coach's face turned red as he screamed at the aspiring athlete. The young man poured his strength into the workout until he could hardly go on – but instead of surrendering to exhaustion, he exerted himself just a little more. When he successfully completed the exercise routine, he fell to the floor and lay there for a few moments, short of breath, yet smiling. He had done the job. He felt the satisfaction that accomplishment brings.

Tests of strength are not limited to the physical realm of sports competitions. At every turn – day to day and hour to hour – a person faces challenges. In business, people must develop the principles that will enable them to meet the test of honesty. In relationships, people must build up their spiritual muscle to defeat jealousy, anger and greed. In order to fulfill our obligations to Hashem, we must become strong enough to overcome innate laziness and selfishness. Life is a series of tests.

We may complain when things get rough, because we feel life is not fair. When we think that we are getting a raw deal – when our efforts are being expended with no payback – we may grunt and express disapproval. But we must believe that Hashem is in charge and He does everything for our welfare. The tests he sends are exercises to help us improve and grow to our full potential. Just as the coach pushes the athlete, nudging his innate talents towards physical success, so, too, Hashem tests us to help our potential develop into reality.

We all have our individual ingredients for greatness instilled in us when we are born. Hashem knows what tests we need to turn our potential into real powers. We must study Torah in order to perfect our Yirat Shamayim – fear of Hashem – so that when we are tested, we react in a way that will please Hashem.

Perhaps our potential is not as great as Abraham Abinu's or – at least in a relative sense – perhaps it is. One thing is certain: Hashem knows what we are capable of achieving and He will provide the precise, personalized training program to develop each of us into the perfect "me." Our job is to rise to the occasion – to accept the challenges and build our spiritual muscle step by step to reach our full potential. May we all use it – so that we don't lose it. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)