

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PARASHAT RE'EH

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 54:11-55:5

SEPTEMBER 2-3, 2016 30 AB 5776

**Rosh Hodesh Elul will be celebrated on Shabbat & Sunday, September 3 & 4.
Selichot Begin on Monday Morning**

**DEDICATIONS: In memory of Joe Kassin, Elul 3 and Florence Deutsch Elul 5
In memory of Amy Haber - Gittel Bracha bat Alta Leah A"H
And in memory of Albert Azizo - Avraham ben Rachel A"H**

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Editors Notes

This week we had too many funerals. My intent was to write about them as they relate to the Perasha. I started, but I just couldn't.

This week I had a number of texts and emails asking about visiting kabalists. I knew I wrote about this before, so I went to the archives. The following is from the Elul 5750/ 2010. It really is apropos as we read Re'eh where charity is ordered and as we consider the month of Elul or repentance. And when you get to the end if you are motivated and even if you were motivated six years ago, you might send a check. Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov and enjoy Memorial Day

Sadly in the emails I received this week, I heard many nightmare stories of people going to the "holy men" and being given guarantees for huge donations. One told of a parent who the kabalist said would be healed, the parent dies. Another told of a child who would find their basheret, but who in the end married and divorced twice. And more than a few who invested in projects they might have never touched if in their right mind and then lost millions. All went to these "rabbis" based on the advice of others who swore by them. At first they were puzzled as to why others got healthy, made millions or seemed blessed as a result of their visits. But after investigation they discovered that it was the few who reported the miracles and the vast majority received nothing but a tax deduction and remained silent. Many were interested in reading more of what Rav Yaakov Hillel wrote. Some sent me follow up articles including one entitled, "Rav Yaakov Hillel Outs the Charlatans", by Yitzchok Adlerstein, published back in November of 2006.

Rav Yaakov Hillel, one of the acknowledged masters of Kabbalah, spent a few hours on Tuesday with the collected rabbinat of Los Angeles. Accepted in Israel in the widest circles – including Lithuanian yeshiva circles typically far removed from the (often) Sephardic redoubts of Kabbalistic interest – he is an intriguing mixture of elements not usually seen together. Born in India, he speaks English effortlessly. He runs not one, but several yeshivos of note. He demonstrates full grasp of, and appreciation for, the world of chassidus. His shiurim on Kabbalah are attended by many of the stellar names in Torah excellence. He carries himself with the demeanor of classic Sephardic warmth, gentleness, humility, and understatement – but he lets you know that he will brook no nonsense. He is famous in America for his "Faith and Folly," an examination of the misapplication of Kabbalah, in all its manifestations. We expected him to be devastatingly critical of the phonies. We were not disappointed.

He was blunt and unsparing regarding the plethora of Kabbalah wannabes, the people who come to communities reading mezuzahs, or palms, or kesuvos. Lamentably, too many people who should know better, including Torah figures, flock to these charlatans for advice. Besides amounting to nothing more than hokum, he views them as fully flouting halacha, which forbids predicting the future. They accomplish what they do in some cases through accomplices who gather information, and in other cases through a combination of intuition and the careful study of chicanery. Even when this is not true, we should not be swayed by their success in knowing things that others don't. He cited Derech Hashem of the Ramchal, that Hashem sometimes grants supernatural powers to people who have failed to get where they should – not as a reward, but as a punishment. These powers are not holy, but the opposite.

Why are people so eager to suspend their critical thinking and flock to the quacks? Too many have succumbed to the need for instant gratification typical of the rest of the world. Some people want instant

coffee; frum Jews often want instant yeshua (solution of their problems), especially if it does not demand real change on their part. A person suffers a heart attack, and is triumphantly shown that one of his mezuzahs had a hole in the word levavecha – your heart. He concludes that the mezuzah is the problem, instead of realizing that the hole in the mezuzah is the effect, not the cause. The cause of the problem is the spiritual defect in this heart, which is then externalized as the defect in the mezuzah.

The charlatans, he said, can't be real, because they never spent quality time learning Torah. How could they? At eighteen, they became Baba this or Baba that. (He knows of one who ran a brisk business stealing tefillin in his yeshiva days.) The real mekubalim were different. Baba Sali was the head of a beis din till he was seventy. He wrote important works on Choshen Mishpat. After a full life of Torah excellence, he moved on to giving berachos at the age of ninety. The best way to deal with those who come into town and ask to set up shop is to ask them to stop at the local kollel first and give a shiur. It almost always scares them away, because they are incapable.

Fooling people has become a brisk business, through the manipulation of PR machinery. People pay to have their photos printed alongside recognized greats, in order to increase their prestige among the populace. One unworthy candidate paid \$250,000 to be the keynote speaker at the dinner of a major Torah institution, just to bolster his image.

Rav Hillel recounted how his own children proved the gullibility of their neighbors. They persuaded the janitor of their school to accompany them through the street, walking slowly and hunched over, with a white sheet wrapped around him. People – including many who should have known better – rushed over to kiss the hand of the obvious “holy man.”

Some would counter that the Kabbalah merchants may not be talmidei chachamim, but they are “hidden tzadikim.” When a friend of his took this position, Rav Hillel advised him to pull his children out of their yeshivot and Bet Yaakovs. Why bother with the learning? Let them stew in their mediocrity, and Hashem will reward them special powers He gives to the otherwise unaccomplished “hidden tzadik,” who remains hidden by carrying himself like a pathetic failure. This is a terrible error. Hashem does not give such hidden powers to a person whose external appearance and conduct is substandard. The hidden tzadik carries himself with dignity, but whose full worth is not appreciated by others.

Where can we find legitimate Kabbalah personalities? The first rule is to avoid those who get any kind of personal gain from their knowledge. He spoke of someone he knew who would never accept a dime, never a favor for his learning or his beracha. Someone whom this giant had touched positively tried to repay him by performing a favor without his knowledge. When he learned of it, he was so disturbed that he did not speak to his benefactor for decades.

When pushed for the identities of such people, he would not offer a single name. If you want a beracha, go to the most accomplished in Torah – Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Rav Elyashiv. People of their caliber are capable of miracles, but no one of lesser stature.

He struck me as having the best of two worlds: the embrace of serious study of Kabbalah that was part of the Baghdad from which came his great-grandfather, and the focus on the “meat and potatoes” of traditional Ashkenazi learning that he picked up in Gateshead and Ponovezh. He would, however, take issue with such a description, claiming that it misses the point entirely. The legitimate master of Kabbalah has no other option but to be a serious talmid chacham, the result of decades of study of Gemara and Rishonim. There is no other way. Separating the two orbits is artificial.

He didn't enjoy pointing out all that has gone wrong. There was pain in his voice. Having seen Torah and Torah greats in their full glory, both in nigleh and nistar (the revealed and hidden parts of Torah), he is driven to rescue them from those who would infantilize or trivialize them.

It must be lonely at the top, but – to make use of the cliché – boy, what a view! We were enriched and uplifted to hear him share it.

We must realize who Rav Yaakov Hillel is to understand the power of his statements. I heard from brilliant and refined scholars that the Zohar came to explain the secrets of the Torah. About 500 years ago, the Ari came to explain the Zohar and without the Ari we are lost. Then 250 years ago, the Rashash - Ribbi Shalom Sharabi came to explain the Ari and it was through him that the Kabbalah could be understood. Today it is through Rav Hillel that the Sod can be understood.

There were others who wrote telling of miracles they heard about. I found it interesting that most who wrote about miracles rarely wrote in first person. And how does one explain the first person miracles, Rav Hillel gives a number of possibilities, there is also

coincidence and then there are possibly the times that there is something there.

I know of a person who was indicted along with dozens of others for import fraud some years back. Almost all of them pleaded out and were sent to jail for anywhere from one to five years. This man also pleaded out and sentencing guidelines required that he do go to jail for at least 2 years. The man visited a certain rabbi and was asked for a pidyon – an amount of money – and was guaranteed he would not go to jail. The man's lawyer told him that this was ridiculous, but the man tripled his efforts in Torah, misvot, and acts of chesed. At the sentencing everyone was shocked that he unlike any of the others was given home detention.

So I asked another talmid chacham who knows this rabbi how it could be. He explained that at times our blessings are blocked almost like an artery that is clogged. Hashem might be sending down blessing just as the heart is pumping blood but the blockage stops it from going anywhere. Sometimes one can feel this spiritual blockage. It can come from unfulfilled vows (why we do hatarat nedarim this time of year) or from a person who did not give the proscribed amount of sedakah or charity. Perhaps and only perhaps, the pidyon being given to sedakah opened the artery and allowed the blessing to flow.

I discussed this with rabbi Abittan at the time. He agreed that many of us do things to block the pipe and that sedakah or charity is certainly one way of opening the pipe. We say sedakah saves from death perhaps as the interventional cardiologist uses a balloon on a wire to open the artery and save the heart patient from death, giving what we must can do the same.

This time of year especially, it is incumbent upon us to give.

For years as a child I recall the Rabbi in shul on Rosh Hashanah reminding the people not to leave early as the final prayer was a prayer of parnasah or financial success. In our synagogue we sell the honor of opening the ark for this prayer of financial success and many people have sworn by it. Are we paying off Hashem one person asked the Rabbi.. Chas VeShalom – Heaven forbid – he replied. But what we might be doing is unclogging the pipe by opening our hands.

So to all those in Cyberspace who want a blessing of Parnasah – of financial success – be willing to open your hand and help open the pipe. One writer this week suggested I sell the opening of the ark on the

night of Rosh Hashana to the highest bidder in Cyberspace, and have it opened in their honor and for their blessing.

But what if we make it a group effort? Let's see if a few of us can share opening the ark collectively. Let's say we donate \$501 or more each into the partnership and when we open the ark we will say a special tefilah for parnasah in the merit of all the partners who joined in. If you would like to share in this misvah, email me back at sephardiccongregation@gmail.com and we'll include you.

Look you need to give your charity for the year anyway. We'll guarantee it goes to a good cause and it might just be what the heavenly doctor ordered. Join me. And may you be blessed with a year of health, happiness, peace and prosperity.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Not Shocking: George Soros Funds Progressive War on Israel - The billionaire's agenda is to destroy the Jewish state
By Abraham H. Miller • 08/17/16 12:30pm

The recent hack of George Soros' "charitable" giving revealed nothing new. The man who told journalist Steve Kroft in a televised interview that roaming the streets of Budapest with his faux godfather to confiscate the property of his fellow Jews for the Nazis was the most exhilarating time of his life has long had a problem with both his Jewish roots and the creation of a Jewish state.

Most revealing in the interview was Soros' comment that he felt no guilt about what he had done during the war years—not even survivor's guilt, common among those who live through a catastrophe, troubled him.

So, the emergence of documentation showing how Soros funds those whose goal is to destroy the Jewish character of Israel—if not the Jewish state itself—is in keeping with the very essence of a man who as a child so identified with the aggressor that he relished the experience of working for the Nazis.

Ironically, when those who want to vilify Jews need a role model that conforms to their framing of a fictional and vile Jewish character, Soros figures prominently. Yet, Soros' pattern of funding and political backing generally resembles that of the neo-Nazis and Islamists who so conveniently find something in Soros' Jewishness to decry. In reality Soros, with his progressive, anti-Zionist agenda, is actually one of them. He is as much a

practicing Jew as the Iranian ayatollahs; and when it comes to foreign policy, finding daylight between him and them would require a microscope.

It is not surprising that Democratic vice presidential candidate Tim Kaine is hobnobbing with Alexander Soros, George's son and intellectual heir apparent. Alexander Soros is a big fan of Tim Kaine.

And so he should be. Kaine is a prominent supporter of President Obama's ill-conceived and daily-changing Iran deal with its secret memoranda that is not only an existential threat to Israel's existence but is also changing the balance of power in the entire Middle East. This is all the more problematic as Turkey sinks into internal chaos as a result of the unsuccessful coup, which enhances Iran's potential as a serious rival.

This is the very essence of Soros' policies, which have shown greater opposition to a Jew building a bathroom in Jerusalem than the ayatollahs building a nuclear weapon in Iran.

Soros has repeatedly tried to hide his support for the anti-Zionist Jewish progressive. Consequently, J Street for years denied Soros' support, which was hidden through a Hong Kong-based cutout.

Both Soros' foundation and the New Israel Fund, another Soros beneficiary, fund Adalah, a group that trains Israeli-Arabs and Jewish progressives to wage lawfare against the Jewish state and is a strong advocate of BDS.

In my own experience sitting on a panel with a representative of the New Israel Fund at a synagogue in Oakland, California, the NIF panelist vehemently and with outrage denied the very suggestion that his organization funds Adalah. Yet, it does.

Clearly, organizations like J Street and NIF share Soros' anti-Zionist agenda. Otherwise, they would not receive funds from him. But their sharing of that agenda needs to be hidden from their fellow Jews, who might appropriately conclude that these are not organizations seeking to liberalize the Jewish state as much as they want to destroy it.

The revelations from the hack of Soros' foundation only add support to what we already know. Soros' agenda is to destroy Israel as a Jewish state, and those who receive money from him share that agenda. Their attempts to distance themselves from Soros simply show that they cannot afford to have the Jewish community comprehend the actual nature of their intentions.

Summary of the Perasha Re'eh - Mitsvot relevant to living in the land of Israel

Below is a summary of Parashat Re'eh. While the first 3 parshiot in Sefer Devarim generally dealt with Moshe's rebuke of Benei Israel and advice before they entered Israel the next 3 parshiot generally deal with mitsvot and contain the bulk of the mitsvot found in Sefer Devarim. Parashat Re'eh deals with mitsvot relevant to living in the land of Israel. Parashat Shoftim deals with mitsvot related to establishing a community / society. And Parashat Ki Teseh deals with mitsvot relevant to relationships.

- 1- Benei Israel again is told they will get beracha if they follow the mitsvot and curses if they do not. The mitsvah to destroy the Gods of the goyim, korbanot in mishkan Shilo, laws of bamot before mishkan Shilo.
- 2- Korbanot in the Beit Hamikdash. The heter to eat meat that is not brought on the mizbeyach.
- 3- Avodah Zara; a warning not to follow the avodah zara of the goyim in Israel, false prophets, one who entices you to do avodah zara, laws regarding a city of avoda zara.
- 4- Kashrout; the permitted and forbidden animals, fish, and birds, meat & milk
- 5- The halachot of maaser sheni
- 6- Canceling loans in the shemita year. The mitsvah of sedaka. Laws of a Jewish slave.
- 7- Hekdesh by a bechor animal. Pesach, Shavout and Succoth, the mitsvah to make a pilgrimage to Yerushalayim

Parashat Re'eh, Perek 13, Pasook 2, says "Hashem chose us to be his treasured nation from all the other nations". And I thought to myself when I think of the things I am thankful for (health, family, prosperity...) do I ever think thank you Hashem that I am Jewish; thank you for the Shabbat, for the Torah, for the mitsvot. And I thought that a perfect time to have this kavana is when we take out the Torah on Shabbat morning. When taking out the Torah we say "ashrey ha'am she'kacha lo, ashrey ha'am she'adokai elokav (fortunate is the nation that Hashem is our G-d)". I thought this could be a good time to establish a set time to think for a moment how lucky we are. How lucky we are to have this community, to have the Shabbat, to have the Torah as a guidebook to turn to for how to direct our life, to be Hashem's treasured nation! Ashrey ha'am. How lucky are we!

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

"You shall surely tithe." (Debarim 14:22)

The Talmud (Ta'anit 9a) expounds on this passage and says that when one gives ma'aser on his income, he will be rewarded with wealth.

Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum quotes the Ben Ish Hai who compares this to a nursing mother. As long as she nurses her child, her milk supply is replenished and even increases. Once she weans her child, however, her milk dries up. Similarly, as long as one gives charity, he will be guaranteed more money, in order to do more good deeds. When one ceases to give, he is no longer deserving of Hashem's good will.

Later in the perashah it states: "If there shall be a poor person among you...you shall surely open up your hand to him" (15:7-8). Today, many times we have a situation where many beggars come to shul during prayers to solicit funds, distracting those who are praying. Rabbi Avraham Fever says, imagine a person who on the Day of Judgment after 120 years, claims reward for praying each day. In Heaven they scoff, saying, "Do you call that prayer? You were thinking about a hundred different things during prayers!"

But in a shul where charity collectors solicit funds when people are trying to pray, thus creating a disturbance, one can respond that at least he had a good excuse for not concentrating properly. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"[If your Hebrew slave] says to you, 'I shall not go out from you' because he loves you and your house because he fares well with you" (Debarim 15:16)

The Gemara teaches that the owner of a Hebrew slave must treat him and view him as an equal in every respect, and he sometimes even has to treat him as a superior! However, the Gemara also teaches that if two Jews are in dire need of water, and only one of them has a jug of water, his own life takes precedence, and he is not obligated to give the water to the other person. Why is this case different than the case of the slave who must be treated at least as an equal, if not better?

A poor man and a rich man can live in harmony with one another, even though the poor man can't satisfy his physical needs like the rich man. Still yet, he does not feel inferior in any way to his friend as a human being. The slave, on the other hand, is always reminded of his bitter status as a mere servant of another man. Therefore the Torah goes out of its way to demand special treatment for him.

There is a very important lesson to be learned from this. We must understand that different

people have different sensitivities. We must recognize each person's uniqueness, and treat him in a way that we will not hurt his feelings or make him self-conscious of his station in life. Let's take it upon ourselves now, as we approach the selihot season, to treat our fellow man with the proper respect, and to make amends with those to whom we may have shown disservice to in the past. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Who You Are

Every Monday morning people trudge back to work. It is really difficult to get up and running after the two-day weekend break, but each and every one of us does eventually get back into the race. The more motivated workers come in at high speed, and the laid-back ones can't get going until after they've had a second cup of coffee, but everyone does return to the "pursuit of happiness." For most, that means accumulating the "toys" with which adults like to play. Jewels, cars, homes, and vacations head the list...and, as we all know, the ones with the most "marbles" wins.

Well, this is true for those who are primarily concerned with what they can collect in order to represent who they are. But, actually, our real job is to work on who we are rather than what we have. Learning to control our speech or anger, to be more generous and kind, to be more caring and dedicated to the values of Torah – this is the real job we all face every day and every night of our lives. In this job there are no vacations and no weekends. We must be in the heat of the battle all of the time.

When you find yourself getting caught up in the game of collecting material "toys," switch gears and concentrate on your essence, not your possessions. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Among the many topics discussed in Parashat Re'eh is the law of the "Mesit", one who tries to persuade his fellow Jews to abandon the faith and worship idols. The Torah foresees the situation where a person may apply pressure on his family members in an effort to drive them to foreign worship. Indeed, as we know, often the strongest source of negative religious pressure comes from family members. When a person decides to raise his standards of Torah observance, some family members and relatives might disapprove of his lifestyle changes

and will try dissuading him from embarking on this road of spiritual growth.

The Torah treats this phenomenon quite severely, assigning the death penalty for those who attempt to convince others to worship idols. In formulating this law, the Torah explains why such an individual is dealt with so harshly: "For he attempted to lure you away from Hashem your God" (13:11). It is noteworthy that the individual is deemed worthy of capital punishment for the "attempt"—because he tried to lead others astray. Even if his efforts are unsuccessful, and the people he had spoken to remain steadfastly committed to Hashem and to Torah, the person is nevertheless guilty of a grave sin and eligible for capital punishment. The mere attempt to lead other Jews away from Torah is condemnable and a capital offense.

The Saba of Kelm (Rav Simha Zissel Ziv, 1824-1898) noted that if the Torah assigns such a harsh punishment for the mere attempt – successful or otherwise – to lure others to sin, then it certainly guarantees immense reward for those who attempt to bring others closer to Torah observance. Whether or not we are successful, there is great value in just making an effort, initiating any sort of sincere attempt, to lead our fellow Jews to higher religious standards. Certainly, if we are successful, and cause other Jews to draw closer to Torah, even slightly, then we cannot even imagine the reward we will receive. But regardless, our job is try, to make an attempt, to do whatever we can.

This is the Misva of our generation, when there is, unfortunately, widespread ignorance and neglect of Torah tradition. One does not have to be a trained Rabbi or outreach professional to perform this Misva. This is a Misva for each and every one of us, each person utilizing his particular strengths and circumstances toward this goal. Every small attempt is valuable. The results are up to God – but it is up to us to make the effort and do what we can to help the Jewish nation draw closer to the Almighty.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
THE BROADCASTER**

Those of you who regularly read my writings, beloved as you are and may be, know that I like to look at the sport of baseball as a metaphor for life. The

simplicity, beauty and quirky unexpectedness and uncertainties of the game accurately mirror the events in one's personal and national life. Therefore, when I recently read an article about a revered baseball broadcaster, Vin Scully, I felt impelled to share some of my thoughts regarding him with you.

Vin Scully is a broadcaster for the games of the Los Angeles Dodgers. He is currently eighty-eight years old and began his career with the Dodgers in 1950 when the team was still located in Brooklyn. He is retiring at the end of this season, approximately one month from now.

Scully has no peer or imitators in the field of baseball broadcasting. He has an altogether unique voice, style and approach to the game. In fact over the years many an American has listened to Los Angeles Dodgers' baseball games, not so much for the result and excitement of the game itself but rather for the experience of hearing Vin Scully converse with them for a few relaxing hours.

Scully has a dry but wicked sense of humor, a keen eye for human foibles and accomplishments, a dispassionate view of the world and its vagaries and a loyalty to his team, tempered by the realities of available talent and the competitiveness of others.

His comments while broadcasting the game are wide ranging, astute and provide the necessary backdrop to what is otherwise a mere recording of details taking place before his eyes. At this, he is the acknowledged master of his field. He is now revered by all, even by those who are not particularly interested in baseball or in the Los Angeles Dodgers.

So, what does all of this have to do with Judaism, rabbis and Jewish life? Well, I think that what our Jewish society needs today are a few good broadcasters who will be able to put current events into perspective, to be dispassionate about issues that we face, view things realistically and not purely emotionally and judgmentally, and who are loyal to the game but are not afraid to point out errors that are made on the field.

Part of the craft and success of Vin Scully is the meticulous research that he does before every game and even before describing any player in the game. He never resorts to off-the-cuff reactions or to pat slogans. Over the past sixty years of broadcasting, he recognizes how the game has changed and how the situation of the players today is far different from what it was. He is able to take all of this into consideration and thus he is as timely now as he ever was.

Much of our Jewish world is still dealing with the situations and disputes that existed in Eastern Europe or other areas of the Diaspora a century ago. The realization as to how the world has changed, and especially how the Jewish world has changed, is oftentimes not reflected in the statements and positions of our leaders who command our allegiance.

The rules of the game of baseball have never been basically altered. Yet, the game today differs greatly from what it was a century ago. The same thing can be said about the Jewish world. The rules that govern us, the Torah that we study and observe, its laws and commandments, have certainly not changed. However, the Jewish world today is far different from what it was even a few decades ago and we need observers who are able to advise us, grant us perspective and inject realism into our lives and policies.

All of the current issues that face the Jewish religious world – the role of women in religious and secular life, the necessity for education and skills, the grinding poverty which is almost self-inflicted in large sections of the religious Jewish world, the problems of marriage and children, the attitude towards a Jewish state now practically seventy years old – all need to be looked at, reviewed and thought about and then clearly addressed in one fashion or another.

And they should be dealt with in a compassionate and dispassionate manner. We need good broadcasters to frame the game and the players for us. In today's world, both the Jewish and the general, there are few broadcasters who are able to do so. Everyone wants to root for the home team and no one is willing to look at the welfare of the entire game itself. It was this ability that made Vin Scully unique amongst all broadcasters. I regret that he is retiring at such a young age

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Deep Power of Joy

On 14 October 1663 the famous diarist Samuel Pepys paid a visit to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Creechurch Lane in the city of London. Jews had been exiled from England in 1290 but in 1656, following an intercession by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, Oliver Cromwell concluded that there was in fact no legal barrier to Jews living there. So for the first time since the thirteenth century Jews were able to worship openly.

The first synagogue, the one Pepys visited, was

simply a private house belonging to a successful Portuguese Jewish merchant, Antonio Fernandez Carvajal, that had been extended to house the congregation. Pepys had been in the synagogue once before, at the memorial service for Carvajal who died in 1659. That occasion had been sombre and decorous. What he saw on his second visit was something else altogether, a scene of celebration that left him scandalised. This is what he wrote in his diary:

... after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles (i.e. tallitot), and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press (i.e. the Aron) to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle. Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing ... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.

Poor Pepys. No one told him that the day he chose to come to the synagogue was Simchat Torah, nor had he ever seen in a house of worship anything like the exuberant joy of the day when we dance with the Torah scroll as if the world was a wedding and the book a bride, with the same abandon as King David when he brought the holy ark into Jerusalem.

Joy is not the first word that naturally comes to mind when we think of the severity of Judaism as a moral code or the tear-stained pages of Jewish history. As Jews we have degrees in misery, postgraduate qualifications in guilt, and gold-medal performances in wailing and lamentation. Someone once summed up the Jewish festivals in three sentences: "They tried to kill us. We survived. Let's eat." Yet in truth what shines through so many of the psalms is pure, radiant joy. And joy is one of the keywords of the book of Devarim. The root s-m-kh appears once each in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, but twelve times in Devarim, seven of them in our parsha.

What Moses says again and again is that joy is what we should feel in the land of Israel, the land given to us by God, the place to which the whole of Jewish life since the days of Abraham and Sarah has been a journey. The vast universe with its myriad galaxies and stars is God's work of art, but within it planet earth, and within that the land of Israel, and the sacred city of Jerusalem, is where He is closest, where His presence lingers in the air, where the sky is the blue of heaven and the stones are a golden throne. There, said Moses, in "the place the Lord your God will choose ... to place His Name there for His dwelling" (Deut. 12:5), you will celebrate the love between a small and otherwise insignificant people and the God who, taking them as His own, lifted them to greatness.

It will be there, said Moses, that the entire tangled narrative of Jewish history would become lucid, where a whole people – "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no hereditary portion with you" – will sing together, worship together and celebrate the festivals together, knowing that history is not about empire or conquest, nor society about hierarchy and power, that commoner and king, Israelite and priest are all equal in the sight of God, all voices in his holy choir, all dancers in the circle at whose centre is the radiance of the Divine. This is what the covenant is about: the transformation of the human condition through what Wordsworth called "the deep power of joy."^[1]

Happiness (in Greek eudaemonia), Aristotle said, is the ultimate purpose of human existence. We desire many things, but usually as a means to something else. Only one thing is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else, namely happiness.^[2]

There is such a sentiment in Judaism. The biblical word for happiness, Ashrei, is the first word of the book of Psalms and a key word of our daily prayers. But far more often, Tanakh speaks about simcha, joy – and they are different things. Happiness is something you can feel alone, but joy, in Tanakh, is something you share with others. For the first year of marriage, rules Devarim (24:5) a husband must "stay at home and bring joy to the wife he has married." Bringing first-fruits to the Temple, "You and the Levite and the stranger living among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household" (26:11). In one of the most extraordinary lines in the Torah, Moses says that curses will befall the nation not because they served idols or abandoned God but "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness out of

the abundance of all things" (28:47). A failure to rejoice is the first sign of decadence and decay.

There are other differences. Happiness is about a lifetime but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy. King David in the Psalms spoke of danger, fear, dejection, sometimes even despair, but his songs usually end in the major key:

For His anger lasts only a moment,
but His favour lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning ...

You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise you forever. (Psalm 30:6-13)

In Judaism joy is the supreme religious emotion. Here we are, in a world filled with beauty. Every breath we breathe is the spirit of God within us. Around us is the love that moves the sun and all the stars. We are here because someone wanted us to be. The soul that celebrates, sings.

And yes, life is full of grief and disappointments, problems and pains, but beneath it all is the wonder that we are here, in a universe filled with beauty, among people each of whom carries within them a trace of the face of God. Robert Louis Stevenson rightly said: "Find out where joy resides and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all."

In Judaism, faith is not a rival to science, an attempt to explain the universe. It's a sense of wonder, born in a feeling of gratitude. Judaism is about taking life in both hands and making a blessing over it. It is as if God had said to us: I made all this for you. This is my gift. Enjoy it and help others to enjoy it also. Wherever you can, heal some of the pain that people inflict on one another, or the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Because pain, sadness, fear, anger, envy, resentment, these are things that cloud your vision and separate you from others and from Me.

Kierkegaard once wrote: "It takes moral courage to grieve. It takes religious courage to rejoice."^[3] I believe that with all my heart. So I am moved by the

way Jews, who know what it is to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, still see joy as the supreme religious emotion. Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks, that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow God's presence to flow through us into the lives of others. Joy helps heal some of the wounds of our injured, troubled world.

[1] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798."

[2] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1097a 30-34.

[3] Søren Kierkegaard, Journals and Papers, 2179

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"You are children of Hashem your G-d" (14:1)

[This Pasuk is referring to making a wound into ones skin as a sign of mourning as the idolaters do]

This is one of the most thunderous declarations in Hashem's Torah.

You and you alone, are Hashem's children.

This can be understood in at least three aspects, all true.

- 1- Because you are under My especial care, as a child under his parent's care, you need not be overly distraught at the death of some loved one. I Hashem do solely what is good for My children, and the departed soul has been transported to the happiness of the Afterlife where it enjoys the closeness to his Father. Therefore, do not cut yourselves because of excessive grief (Ibn Ezra).
- 2- Because you are the sons of Hashem, therefore you should seek to emulate Him, just as sons resemble their father. Hashem hates idolatry and sorcery and all the practices of the nations, and His sons therefore must avoid such behavior.
- 3- Because you are the sons of Hashem, you must be handsome and well-groomed, and not lacerated with bloody wounds or plucked out hair (Sifri). This is indicated as a permanent requirement, but in instances of excessive grief, it must be reinforced by a special commandment. Also, because you are my children, you must be well behaved; for your behavior is a reflection on my honor. My children should not imitate the practices of wild grief and senseless idolatry.

We note that this tremendous declaration ("You are children of Hashem") is absolute and unconditional. You are right now children of Hashem!

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