

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYELECH/SHUBAH

Haftarah: Hoshea 14:2-10, Yoel 2:11-27, Micah 7:18-20

SEPTEMBER 22, 2012

6 TISHREI 5773

DEDICATIONS: In memory of David Gindi HaKohen

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS
Mazal Tov to the Lembergers on their new baby boy

Kiddush sponsored by the Abittan, Goldman, Lasher, Reich and Scherzer Families
In memory of their father and grandfather, Hirsh J Goldman - Tzvi Yaakov Ben Chaim

Friday Night: Candles: 6:34 PM

Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 6:35 PM

Morning Service (Sharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah by 9:04

11:00 - 12:00 Shabbat Morning Kids Program for girls ages 4-8 - Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . .

NEW! Shabbat morning babysitting from 11-12 with Leah Colish. Downstairs in the playroom. Snacks will be served. Ages 2-4. Please no one less than 2 years old.

Minha: 6:00 PM

Seudah Shelishi and a Class – Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon – 6:40

Evening Service (Arbith): 7:30 - Shabbat Ends: 7:34 PM followed by Hatara

“Hatara”- the nullifying of one’s vows and oaths for the past year will be recited after Arbit.

All men and women are urged to attend.

Motzi Shabbat Melave Malka at Subsational followed by 1AM Selichot in Brooklyn. Teenage boys only with Rabbi Colish and Lloyd. Please RSVP. Meet at Sephardic at 10:00 pm.

Yom Kippur Children's Programming Schedule

Rabbi's Study 10:30 -12:30 with Orah ages 4-8. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more . . .

Downstairs Playroom 10:30-12:30 Babysitting available ages 2-4 with Leah Colish and Orah

Please no one less than 2 years old.

Sunday – Selichot 7AM – Sharith 8 AM / Monday and Tuesday Selichot 6AM – Sharith 7AM /

Thursday and Friday – Sharith 7AM – YEHI SHEM

Torah Classes

Registration is underway for the continuation of our Kosher Kitchen Class series with Rabbi Yosef for men and ladies. Classes will resume in October. Details to follow . . .

Gentlemen, please advise if you will be joining us for Halacha class on Tuesday evenings at 8:30 beginning November in Hilchot Pesach Belyun.

Community Events

Saturday Night September 23rd: Motzi Shabbat Melave Malka at Subsational followed by 1AM Selichot in Brooklyn. Teenage boys only with Rabbi Colish and Lloyd. Please RSVP. Meet at Sephardic at 10:00 pm.

Cub Scout Registration is under way! If you'd like to sign up or know somebody who might, please contact Rabbi Yosef.

Registration is underway for Fall Sunday Funday Hoolahoop in for girls ages 5 and up in the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach. Sunday mornings from 10:00-11:00

YOM KIPPUR SCHEDULE

Tuesday September 25 – Ereb Yom Kippur

Selihot 6:00 AM / Shahrit 7:00 AM

Minha (with Tefillin) 2:00 PM

Yom Kippur Candle Lighting 6:30 PM

Fast Begins 6:40 PM

Kal Nidre Services followed by Arbit 6:45 PM

Wednesday September 26 – Yom Kippur

Shahrit 8:00 AM / Musaf 12:30 PM / Minha 4:00 PM

Ne'ilah Services 6:00 PM / Arbit 7:25 PM

Prayer Times are approximate and may change

Fast Ends - Habdala 7:30 PM

Birkat Halebana – Blessing on the Moon

Yom Kippur – Selected Honors to presell

Open the Ark for Kal Nidre – The Mizrahi Family for Ely Altarac

Sefer Kal Nidre \$2600

Each of the additional Torahs brought out with Sefer Kal Nidre 2-12 @ \$ 1000 ea

All the Rimonim for all the Torahs \$ 1000

Parnasa of evening service – The prayer for financial success Purchased by David Bibi for Leon Sutton

Opening the Ark on Yom Kippur - \$ 1800

Carrying The Torah \$ 1500

Carrying The Second Torah \$ 1300

Carry the Haftara Case \$500

Rimonim for all the Torah's \$500

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$ 800

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$ 300

Mashlim with Kaddish said in memory of a loved one \$ 1500

Haftara Yom Kippur Day \$1800

Parnasa Yom Kippur 2600

Opening the Ark Mincha on Yom Kippur - \$ 1800

Carrying The Torah \$ 1500

Carry the Haftara Case \$500

Rimonim for all the Torah's \$200

Raise the Torah Hagbah \$ 400

Gelila Wrap the Torah \$ 200

Maftir Yonah - Albert and Eleanor for Sam Yusupov

Parnasa Yom Kippur Mincha Purchased by Hal Waldman for The Tennis Gang –

Opening Ark Neila –The Mizrahi Family for Hal Waldman

ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Take a peek into Kosher Culinary Arts School in Jerusalem with my daughter Mikhayla who is going through a rigorous 6 month program. bitemebymik.blogspot.com

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

EDITORS NOTES:

I was preparing an article this morning on anger, ego and appreciation, but then had to jump into a pressing situation. So using my dad's suggestion, I went back into the archives and pulled the following from 2008. The message from then is just as pertinent and maybe more so today. In reading through the article, I realized that even the article I was working on finds its solution in Achvah. Anger totally messes up our system. We can't think correctly and we act haphazardly. Anger often is born from our inability to be modeh. In Hebrew the word Modeh means to Thank as we say each morning in Modeh Ani, but it also means to admit. I must admit that I am dependent on you, that we are dependent upon each other and I thank you for completing me. But ego wants us to think that it's all about us. This stops us from admitting. This stops us from thanking. This prevents us from feeling someone else's pain, stepping into their shoes or trying to take a look at the situation through their eyes. The result is often anger and the blockages that come through anger make us mentally and even physically sick. Anger truly is a form of

tumah – defilement. When we are in a state of tumah – of uncleanness – we are in a state of separation. Interesting enough anger is one of the things we hope to shed when we enter the Miveh prior to the holiday. The two words anger and Mikveh share the same numeric value. Anger makes us impure. Anger closes our world. It's only after we release the anger and realize that it's coming from a bad place that we can hope to approach G-d on Yom Kippur

So back to 2008 for a moment ...

Each week we bless the congregation with a blessing for ahava veachva, shalom vereut. Not coincidentally, we use the same words in blessing a bride and groom at their marriage. Loosely translated as love and brotherhood, peace and friendship; in this case as in many others, the translation does little justice.

Rabbi Abittan often spoke of the subject and after reading an obituary on the actor Paul Newman this morning (Sunday), I was reminded of the Rabbi's words. I thought it fitting as we approach Yom Kippur which the Rabbis teach has the power to atone for sins between man and G-d, but which requires man to make amends with his brother before sins between man and man can be forgiven to broach the subject.

These four words, as the Rabbis explain, ahava - love (ve) achva - brotherhood, shalom - peace, (ve) reut - friendship are listed in an ascending order with Ahava representing the lowest of the four while Reut represents the

highest.

Ahava comes from the Hebrew word Hab meaning to give. We often believe that we come to love someone who gives to us, but in fact the opposite is true. We love those we give to. Who do we give more of ourselves to than to our children and do we love anyone more than them? Why are sports fans often so fanatical about their teams? Because they invest so much time and emotion in them whether staying up late to watch a game to running for the sports page in the morning to tuning into WFAN or ESPN for the drive time sports talk. Investing in something brings us to this level of Ahava.

On a higher level is Achvah or brotherhood. This is where someone can rise to the level to actually feel another's pain. We know there is no greater suffering than suffering alone. Psychologists teach us that knowing that one is not alone in ones situation eases the burden tremendously.

Dahlia Lithwick writes in today's (Sunday) New York Post, "The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp opened in Connecticut in 1988 to provide a summer camping experience - fishing, tie-dye, ghost stories, s'mores - for seriously ill children. By 1989, when I started working there as a counselor, virtually everyone on staff would tell some version of the same story: Paul Newman, who had founded the camp when it became clear his little salad-dressing lark was accidentally going to earn him millions (he has given more than 250 million of it to charity), stops by for one of his not-infrequent visits. He plops

down at a table in the dining hall next to some kid with leukemia, or HIV, or sickle cell anemia, and starts to eat lunch. One version of the story has the kid look from the picture of Newman on the Newman's Own lemonade carton to Newman himself, then back to the carton and back to Newman again before asking, "Are you lost?" Another version: The kid looks steadily at him and demands, "Are you really Paul Human?" ...

She continues that, "terrified parents would deliver their wan, weary kid at the start of the session with warnings and cautions and lists of things not to be attempted. They'd return 10 days later to find the same kid, tanned and bruisey, halfway up a tree or cannon-balling into the deep end of the pool. Their wigs or prosthetic arms - props of years spent trying to fit in - were forgotten in the duffel under the bed. Shame, stigma, fear, worry, all vaporized by a few days of being ordinary."

Think about the word she used. Ordinary! She speaks of the gift of Being Ordinary. How strange in a world where so many crave stardom, celebrity and the knowledge that they are special to find a miracle in being Ordinary.

I remember a class Rabbi Joey Haber gave on Achvah. He spoke of kids in Camp Simcha - a special camp for children suffering from cancer - who arrived and realized they were not alone in their suffering. They realized that there were others like them. Often for the first times in their lives they saw themselves in a group where they could be in a way, normal or ordinary for a

few days. But even after leaving camp, their lives were changed by the experience and the knowledge that they would never be alone again. There were others who felt their pain.

I have been noticing more articles on support groups and have come to understand that their greatest benefit is in letting the person suffering know that they are not alone, others have been through it, others are there for them and others can feel their pain and that knowledge alone miraculously will ease that pain.

The knowledge that they were not alone carried prisoners through POW camps and Survivors through the Holocaust.

And I guess our Rabbis have known this for millennia.

Melachim Bet tells a story is told of the Shunamite woman. The prophet Elisha would often travel through the town of Shunem, knowing that he was a holy man and with her husband's permission a well-to-do woman of the town built him a small room upon her roof in which the prophet could stay and study when in the area. Out of gratitude Elisha offers to speak to the King on the women's behalf, for either an official job for her husband or any other needs or concerns the woman might have. Her response is short and simple; "Betch Ami Ani Yoshevet" - Among my people do I dwell. She wants to be ordinary. She wants nothing special.

But even more powerful are the laws of mourning. Someone loses a relative and finds themselves in terrible pain. What is the job of

the visitor? How does one comfort them? We come, we sit with them, we listen to them, we cry with them and we feel their pain and we leave them knowing that they are not alone.

My friends who work in Bikur Holim helping others often fear that their exposure to the pain of so many people will insulate them from feeling the pain of their "clients".

Today in times of economic uncertainty we get calls every day telling of people who have lost their jobs, others are unable to find new jobs. Some are concerned with their retirement plans as they see assets disappearing. Business owners don't know how they will manage without lines of credits as the banks call them in. Salespeople are not writing orders. The first step in helping is to listen and to feel their pain.

All around people are asking, "What will we do?" As an aside, Rabbi Yaakov Reisman suggested that this plea sounds very much like the words found in the Torah with regard to Shemitah ... And if you should say, "What will we eat in the seventh year?"

When did we last hear this cry? I remember it as if it was yesterday. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 there was a widespread fear that everything would crash. Coincidentally that year as this year followed the Shemitah - the seventh year where the land is to lay fallow. .

So how do we protect ourselves?

Let's leave Shalom which we would better translate as a feeling

of completion and unity with another and Reut which is feeling another's joy (the ultimate test) aside for now. Maybe we'll come back to them next year.

For this year maybe we can focus on the first two. Let's focus on Ahava on love through giving and on Achvah. on feeling the pain of others.

Who am I talking to? Remember when I write, I am usually just talking to myself. Do I give enough? Does one ever? And do I feel the pain of others? Certainly not nearly enough! Maybe we can all focus on these two aspects and in doing so make the world a much better place. And in the merit of our giving, may Hashem give us and in the merit of our feeling for others, may Hashem of mercy on all of us. May He sweeten the aspect of justice with kindness. May He relieve our maladies. May He end our suffering. May He bring us all a sense of calm.

Begin the year with its blessings!
Gemar Chatimah Tovah,
David Bibi

Halacha Yomit - Erev Yom Kippur

The Torah (Vayikra 23) states: "And you shall oppress yourselves on the ninth of the month at night," meaning that the obligation to fast on Yom Kippur begins from the night of the tenth of Tishrei. Our Sages (Berachot 8a) inquired about the language of the verse, "The ninth of the month at night," that would it not make more sense to write "the tenth of the month" and we shall understand by default that the obligation to fast begins from the night of the tenth as we find

regarding all other laws of the Torah the day begins with the preceding night, as we find by Shabbat which begins from sunset on Friday evening?

Our Sages answered that the reason why the verse states, "The ninth of the month at night," is in order to teach us that anyone who eats and drinks on the ninth of the month, it is considered as if he has fasted for the ninth and tenth of the month. It is preferable to minimize one's workload on Erev Yom Kippur in order that one is able to eat and drink copiously. Anyone who performs work on Erev Yom Kippur shall never see any blessing from the money he earns on that day.

There are several reasons given for this Mitzvah. The Rosh writes that the reason Hashem commanded us to perform this Mitzvah is because since Hashem, with all of His love, commanded us to fast on Yom Kippur in order to atone for our sins, He thus commanded us to strengthen ourselves by eating and drinking before Yom Kippur so that we may fast the next day. The Shibleh Ha'Leket writes that, on the contrary, when one eats and drinks on Erev Yom Kippur, the fast the next day is harder for him and in this way one fulfills the verse, "You shall oppress yourselves." The Sefat Emet writes an additional reason, that when one eats and drinks, this gladdens him and as a result he will come to appease his friend on Erev Yom Kippur.

Maran Harav Ovadia Yosef Shlit" a writes that women are also obligated in this Mitzvah to eat and drink plentifully on Erev Yom Kippur. Although women are exempt from performing positive Mitzvot which are time-bound and in our situation the Mitzvah is to actively go and eat, nevertheless, since the Rosh writes that the

reason for this Mitzvah is in order to give us strength for the upcoming fast and women are also obligated to fast, they are also subsequently obligated to strengthen themselves in preparation for the fast.

It is customary to pray Mincha at an early hour on Erev Yom Kippur. In the Amidah prayer, after reciting the verse, "Yihyu Leratzon Imrei Fi Vehegyon Libi Lefanecha, Hashem Tzuri Vego'ali," one recites Viduy (the confessional prayer) and "Al Chet" as is printed in Yom Kippur Machzorim. Then, one should proceed home and eat his last meal before the onset of the fast. One should begin to abstain from the five prohibitions that apply on Yom Kippur (i.e. eating and drinking, washing, rubbing one's self with oils or lotions, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations) before sunset. (It is a Torah commandment to begin abstaining from all the Yom Kippur-related prohibitions before sunset; it is preferable to do so at least fifteen minutes before sunset.)

It is a Mitzvah to light candles in honor of Yom Kippur. Before lighting, one should recite the blessing of, "Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'Olam Asher Kideshanu Bemitzvotav Vetzivanu Le'Hadlik Ner Shel Yom HaKippurim." A woman should not recite the Shehecheyanu blessing along with the blessing on the candles until she has removed her leather shoes; only after doing so can one recite this blessing, for by reciting this blessing, she accepts upon herself the sanctity of Yom Kippur and becomes obligated to abstain from the five prohibitions immediately.

It is customary to wrap one's self in his Tallit before sunset (so that one will be able to recite the

blessing); all of the Yom Kippur prayers are recited while wearing a Tallit so that one can pray with concentration while it is on him.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Remember us for life, O King who desires life" (Amidah - Ten Days of Teshubah)

During the Ten Days of Teshubah we ask Hashem for life. During our busy schedules we tend to take life for granted. On the night of Yom Kippur, all Jews around the world recite the Kal Nidre. Kal Nidre is another form of hatarat nedarim, which is an annulment of vows. Tradition has it that the Kal Nidre service originated in Spain. The Jews had a glorious period of growth and prosperity until the terrible Spanish Inquisition began. Many good Jews were forced to accept Christianity in order to save their lives. On the night of Yom Kippur they would secretly gather in caves and basements. There they would recite in front of all the people the words of Kal Nidre, to annul all of the vows of Christianity that they were forced to accept. What a struggle these people went through! How fortunate are we.

As I have mentioned many times, we must ask Hashem on a daily basis for long life with good health. In our prayer of "Zochrenu l'hayim," Remember us for life, we ask for life. However, we must have a clear definition of life in our minds as we ask for it. Rabbi Matityahu Solomon once said: life means different things for different people. For most people it means simply to live. However, to some people their house is their life. To some their car is their life, and to others, their baseball team is their life. A person must avoid making these things so important that they become that person's "life-

wish," prompting Hashem to answer this foolish wish instead of granting him the most important gift of life. May Hashem grant us all long life in good health, Amen. Rabbi Reuven Semah

Although Yom Kippur atones for a good portion of our sins, those transgressions between man and his fellow man are not forgiven unless we ask our friend to forgive us first. This should be a priority on everyone's list as we come to Yom Kippur, because we want to achieve the best atonement possible and we need to be forgiven by those we may have wronged. It is a proper custom to ask all of our friends' forgiveness before the holiday and to say we forgive them when asked by them.. It is especially important to kiss our parents' hands on Ereb Kippur and ask their forgiveness and, if they are not near us, to do it on the telephone. In addition, many synagogues have instituted that before Kal Nidre it is announced that everyone should forgive each other and everyone should say that they have forgiven. This creates a tremendous force of atonement in Heaven and will affect a Divine Pardon by Hashem to all His people. Tizku Leshanim Rabot. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

TO LIFE

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Your days approach that you must die.'" (Debarim 31:14)

The Midrash tells a story about the great sage, Rabbi Shimon ben Halaftha, who went to a berit milah at which the father made an impressive feast. After serving a very old wine to the guests, the father proudly proclaimed that he would age a portion of this wine for the future joyful occasions of his son. Upon

leaving the feast, the sage encountered the Angel of Death, who seemed to be in a "happy mood." He questioned the Angel as to the source of his merriment. The Angel responded that he was laughing at the foolishness of human beings. He explained that this man, who had promised to put away wine for the future, would actually be dead in less than thirty days. The sage then asked the Angel to show him his own time of death. The Angel responded, "I have no power of you or other righteous people like you. Hashem often desires your good deeds and He, therefore, adds days to your originally predetermined life-span," as it says in Mishlei 10:27, "the fear of Hashem adds days."

During the Days of Awe, our future is precarious. Our merit is meticulously scrutinized every day. The Mezritcher Maggid states that man is placed on this world to fulfill a purpose. When that mission has been completed, we should constantly undertake new spiritual endeavors, so that they may serve as a source of merit for our continued life. With this thought in mind, we might view opportunities for new spiritual tasks as a special gift from Hashem for prolonged life. (Peninim on the Torah)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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The Easiest Misva
 Many of us find Teshuba to be a difficult, grueling process. We often feel too intimidated to even begin thinking about Teshuba and changing who we are.

And yet, ironically enough, the Torah indicates that Teshuba is actually the easiest Misva. Last Shabbat, in Parashat Nisavim, we read, "For this Misva...is not too difficult for you, nor is it distant from you... It is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart..." (Debarim 30:11-14). The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Nahmanides, Spain, 1194-1270) explains these Pesukim as referring to the Misva of Teshuba. It is regarding this Misva that we are reassured that it is easy, that it is not difficult or distant, that it can be easily achieved.

The Torah does not make this point about any other Misva. We are never told that it is easy to observe Shabbat or Pesah. Yet, specifically when it comes to Teshuba, to changing our characters, which seems to be the most difficult Misva of all, the Torah tells us that is easy. How could Teshuba be an easy Misva?

To answer this question, we turn our attention to an esoteric comment of the Arizal (Rabbi Yishak Luria of Safed, 1534-1572) concerning the widespread custom to wear a Tallit on the night of Yom Kippur. It is generally customary to ensure to put on the Tallit before sundown, so that we are able to recite the Beracha over the Tallit. Since a Beracha is not recited when putting on Sisit at night, and we want to "cash in" on every possible Misva before Yom Kippur, we try to put on the Tallit before sundown so we can recite a Beracha. The Arizal, however, held differently. He writes – astonishingly enough – that one does not recite a Beracha over the Tallit worn on the night of Yom Kippur, even if he puts on the Tallit before sundown, because the Tallit does not belong to him. Even though he paid for the Tallit and he wears it

every day, it is not his. On Yom Kippur, the Tallit belongs to the Almighty.

How are we to understand this concept, that the Tallit on Yom Kippur actually belongs to God, and is not ours?

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001) offers a beautiful explanation. God relates to us in many different ways. On some occasions, He relates to us as a mighty warrior, and at others as a loving father. Sometimes He acts as judge, and other times as a king. Forgive the expression, but we might say that God wears many hats, as it were, playing a wide range of different roles in our lives. On Yom Kippur, Rav Pincus says, God relates to us as a mother. More often than not, when a father is caring for an infant, he returns the infant to the mother as soon as the infant soils himself and his clothing and needs to be cleaned and changed. Fathers certainly enjoy coddling and spending time with their baby, but they rush to pass on the childcare responsibilities once there is filth involved.

Sin soils the soul. We cannot see the filth with our eyes, but the filth of sin exists, and the great Sadikim are able to sense it. On Yom Kippur, God comes to us as a loving, tender, caring mother to clean up our mess, to get rid of our sins and make us clean as new. We enter Yom Kippur like an infant that has just dirtied himself, and we emerge from Yom Kippur like an infant wrapped in his towel after his bath, fresh and clean. The Tallit, Rav Pincus says, symbolizes the "towel" in which God wraps us, like a mother wrapping her clean child. This is not our Tallit. After all, on Yom Kippur we are like infants, who own nothing. This is our "Mother's" Tallit, the Tallit which

God wraps us in as He cleanses our souls.

The Sages describe Yom Kippur as one of the happiest days of the year. It is not a sad day; it is an exciting day, because becoming clean is exciting. We are transformed from a state of filth to a state of perfect cleanliness.

And this is why Teshuba is so easy – because it is the only Misva we do with God nearby as a loving mother helping us. God comes to clean us. As the Mishna says, "Fortunate are you, Israel! Before whom you are purified, and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven!" Hashem cleans us on Yom Kippur, He holds our hand and leads us through the process of repentance, and this is what makes it easy.

There is, however, one condition. A baby must cry out to his mother when he is dirty and needs to be cleaned. The mother won't come unless she hears the infant's desperate cries for help. And the same is true of us and our "Mother." God comes to clean us only after He hears us crying for help. This means that at some point on Yom Kippur – and the earlier the better – we have to cry out desperately for God to come help us. We need to sincerely feel the discomfort of the accumulated filth on our souls, and to genuinely cry out to God to help us. He will then immediately come to clean us off like a mother devotedly tends to her child, and warmly wrap us in His Tallit, eliminating all our sins, leading us back to His service, and granting us complete forgiveness and the precious opportunity to begin the year with a perfectly clean slate.

Rabbi Wein

The parsha of Vayelech is the parsha that contains the smallest number of verses – only thirty – of any other parsha in the Torah. It also is the parsha that usually coincides with Shabat Shuva, the holy Shabat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The words of the parsha are part of the last testament of Moshe uttered on the day of his passing from this earth.

As is his wont, Moshe minces no words regarding the fate of the Jewish people in its future story. Thus the shortest parsha of the Torah is also one of the most powerful of all of the parshiyot of the Torah. In effect Moshe warns his people Israel that the Lord will hold them accountable to the terms of the covenant of Sinai and that that covenant is irreversible and unbreakable.

It will take a long time and much twisting and turning by the Jewish people before they accept that reality of covenantal responsibility. But Moshe assures them that eventually the message will set in and that this will be the basis for the Jewish return to God and His Torah. This is the essence of the parsha's content and the brevity of the parsha only serves to enhance the power of its message.

There are certain self-evident truths that need no extra words, explanations or language. This parsha especially gains in power and relevance as Jewish history unfolds over thousands of years. Every deviation from the covenant of Sinai has eventually brought with it angst and pain if not even disaster in the Jewish world. Just look around at Jewish society and history and Moshe's words are clearly vindicated by circumstances and events.

Personal repentance and return is far easier to achieve than is national repentance and return. The Jewish people or at least a significant part of it has strayed very far away from the covenant of Sinai. The situation here in Israel is far better than it is in the Diaspora where intermarriage, ignorance, alienation and false gods have eroded Jewish faith, family, self-identity and values. How is it possible to hope for a national return to the covenant of Sinai under such circumstances?

Our short parsha seems to indicate that it will be a process and not a sudden epiphany. The prophet in the haftarah indicates that such a process will be incomplete without the recognition that the false gods and temporarily popular ideals all have led nowhere. He echoes Moshe's words in our parsha that return and repentance in a national sense can only occur if there is a realization how badly we have gone astray.

The great challenge, of the modern culture upon us, is how pervasive it is in every facet of our lives. The confusion that this engenders in the Jewish people prevents clear thinking, accurate judgment and honest assessments of true Jewish values versus current faddish correctness.

Our parsha is short but our way back is long and rigorous. In this good and blessed year that has just begun let us start - and continue that journey that leads back to Sinai and forwards to complete national redemption

Sir Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

The Heart, the Home, the Text

By now Moses had given 612 commands to the Israelites. But there was one further instruction he still had to give, the last of his life, the final mitzvah in the Torah:

Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be My witness against the people of Israel. (Deut. 31: 19)

The oral tradition understood this to be a command that each Israelite should take part in the writing of a Sefer Torah. Here is how Maimonides states the law:

Every male Israelite is commanded to write a Torah scroll for himself, as it says, "Now therefore write this song," meaning, "Write for yourselves [a complete copy of] the Torah that contains this song," since we do not write isolated passages of the Torah [but only a complete scroll]. Even if one has inherited a Torah scroll from his parents, nonetheless it is a mitzvah to write one for oneself, and one who does so is as if he had received [the Torah] from Mount Sinai. One who does not know how to write a scroll may engage [a scribe] to do it for him, and whoever corrects even one letter is as if he has written a whole scroll. (Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah and Sefer Torah 7: 1)

There is something poetic in the fact that Moses left this law until the last. For it was as if he were saying to the next generation, and all future generations: "Do not think it is enough to be able to say, My ancestors received the

Torah from Moses. You must take it and make it new in every generation." And so Jews did.

The Koran calls Jews "the people of the Book." That is a great understatement. The whole of Judaism is an extended love story between a people and a book – between Jews and the Torah. Never has a people loved and honoured a book more. They read it, studied it, argued with it, lived it. In its presence they stood as if it were a king. On Simchat Torah, they danced with it as if it were a bride. If, G-d forbid, it fell, they fasted. If one was no longer fit for use it was buried as if it were a relative that had died.

For a thousand years they wrote commentaries to it in the form of the rest of Tenakh (there were a thousand years between Moses and Malachi, the last of the prophets, and in the very last chapter of the prophetic books Malachi says, "Remember the Torah of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel"). Then for another thousand years, between the last of the prophets and the closure of the Babylonian Talmud, they wrote commentaries to the commentaries in the form of the documents – Midrash, Mishnah and Gemarra – of the Oral Law. Then for a further thousand years, from the Gaonim to the Rishonim to the Acharonim, they wrote commentaries to the commentaries, in the form of biblical exegesis, law codes and works of philosophy. Until the modern age virtually every Jewish text was directly or indirectly a commentary to the Torah.

For a hundred generations it was more than a book. It was God's love letter to the Jewish people, the gift of His word, the pledge of their betrothal, the marriage contract between heaven and the

Jewish people, the bond that God would never break or rescind. It was the story of the people and their written constitution as a nation under God. When they were exiled from their land it became the documentary evidence of past promise and future hope. In a brilliant phrase the poet Heinrich Heine called the Torah "the portable homeland of the Jew." In George Steiner's gloss, "The text is home; each commentary a return." [1]

Dispersed, scattered, landless, powerless, so long as a Jew had the Torah he or she was at home – if not physically then spiritually. There were times when it was all they had. Hence the lacerating line in one of the liturgical poems in Neilah at the end of Yom Kippur: Ein lanu shiur rak haTorah hazot, "We have nothing left except this Torah."

It was their world. According to one Midrash it was the architecture of creation: "God looked in the Torah and created the universe." According to another tradition, the whole Torah was a single, mystical name of God. It was written, said the sages, in letters of black fire on white fire. Rabbi Jose ben Kisma, arrested by the Romans for teaching Torah in public, was sentenced to death, wrapped in a Torah scroll that was then set on fire. As he was dying his students asked him what he saw. He replied, "I see the parchment burning but the letters flying [back to heaven]" (Avodah Zarah 18a). The Romans might burn the scrolls but the Torah was indestructible.

So there is immense power in the idea that, as Moses reached the end of his life, and the Torah the end of its narrative, the final imperative should be a command to continue to write and study the Torah, teaching it to the people

and "putting it in their mouths" so that it would not abandon them, nor they, it. God's word would live within them, giving them life.

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The Talmud tells an intriguing story about King David, who asked God to tell him how long he would live. God told him, that is something no mortal knows. The most God would disclose to David was that he would die on Shabbat. The Talmud then says that every Shabbat, David's "mouth would not cease from learning" during the entire day.

When the day came for David to die, the Angel of Death was despatched, but finding David learning incessantly, was unable to take him – the Torah being a form of undying life. Eventually the angel was forced to devise a stratagem. He caused a rustling noise in a tree in the royal garden. David climbed up a ladder to see what was making the noise. A rung of the ladder broke. David fell, and for a moment ceased learning. In that moment he died (Shabbat 30a-b).

What is this story about? At the simplest level it is the sages' way of re-envisioning King David less as a military hero and Israel's greatest king than as a penitent and Torah scholar (note that several of the Psalms, notably 1, 19 and 119, are poems in praise of Torah study). But at a deeper level it seems to be saying more. David here symbolizes the Jewish people. So long as the Jewish people never stop learning, it will not die. The national equivalent of the angel of death – the law that all nations, however great, eventually decline and fall – does not apply to a people who never cease to study, never forgetting who they are and why.

Hence the Torah ends with the last command – to keep writing and studying Torah. And this is epitomized in the beautiful custom, on Simchat Torah, to move immediately from reading the end of the Torah to reading the beginning. The last word in the Torah is Yisrael; the last letter is a lamed. The first word of the Torah is Bereishit; the first letter is beit. Lamed followed by beit spells lev, "heart." So long as the Jewish people never stop learning, the Jewish heart will never stop beating. Never has a people loved a book more. Never has a book sustained a people longer or lifted it higher

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

Rav Avigdor Miller's Ten Steps to Greatness

1. Spend at least 30 seconds each day thinking about Olam Haba (the World to Come) and that we are in this world only as a preparation for the world to come.
2. Spend a few seconds each day in a private place and say to: "I love you Ha-Shem". You will be fulfilling a positive commandment from the Torah. This will kindle a fire in your heart and will have a powerful effect on your character. Your exteriority bestirs your interiority. Ha-Shem is listening. He loves you much more than you love him.
3. Every day do one act of kindness that no one knows about, in secrecy. Have intention beforehand that you are doing this in order to fulfil your program to greatness. The practice of doing acts of kindness - Gemilut Hasadim - is one of the three most important functions in the world.
4. Encourage someone every day. "Hashem encourages the humble."
5. Spend one minute a day

thinking about what happened yesterday. "Let us search out our ways and investigate." Everyone should have his mind on what he is doing - by reviewing yesterday's actions daily.

6. Make all your actions for the purpose of Heaven. Say once a day: "I am doing (this) in order to be more aware of Ha-Shem."
7. Be aware of the principle: "Man was created in the image of Ha-Shem." Every human face is a reflection of Ha-Shem. Your face is like a screen and your soul like a projector which projects on your face the glory of the human soul, which has in it the greatness of Ha-Shem. Once a day pick a face and think: "I am seeing the image of Ha-Shem." You will begin to understand the endless nobility of a face.

8. Once a day give a person a full smile. Just as Ha-Shem shines on us, we should smile on others. Smile because Ha-Shem wants you to, even though you really don't want to. When you smile have intentions that you are doing it for the purpose of coming closer to Ha-Shem through the Ten Steps To Greatness.

9. "Ha-Shem clothes the naked." Clothing is a testament to the nobility of man. He is unique: man has free will, has a soul, and is made in the image of Ha-Shem. Even Angels are beneath man in greatness. To demonstrate the superiority of mankind, we must be clothed. Spend 30 seconds in the morning thinking about our garments: what a gift they are from Ha-Shem. Say "Malbish Arumin" (He clothes the naked) out loud.

10. Spend time each day thinking about the olden Jerusalem during the time of the Temple. Every day sit on the floor (before going to sleep), spend one second on the floor and mourn for the destruction of Jerusalem. Think "If I should forget you Jerusalem let my right arm forget."

He recommended doing the above exercises for thirty days. "If you feel exhausted, take a break and come back slowly. To become great, you have to be extreme."

Tizku Leshanim Rabot From your friends at Yeshiva Gedolah Bais Yisrael Founded by Rabbi Miller Z'L

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