

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TABO

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 60:1-22

SEPTEMBER 4-5, 2015 21 ELUL 5775

**DEDICATIONS: Mazal Tov and Mabrook to Daniel and Mikhayla on their Wedding this week
In memory of Yosef Ovadia Bibi 19 Elul – Happy Birthday Albert and Happy Birthday Ruby**

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Editors Notes

Free Loans and Shemithah

And it will be, when you come into the land which Hashem your G-d, gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it. This week's portion begins with these words. Although it goes on to discuss the laws of the first fruits, the first thought that strikes me is the thought of my daughter Mikhayla with her soon to be husband Daniel getting ready to make Aliyah and to enter the Land, not as a tourist, but with the intention of fulfilling Hashem's command and taking the Land as an inheritance, of possessing it and settling there for good. And although I am excited for the young couple, the thought of Mikhayla permanently moving half way around the world makes me very emotional. So for now, let's jump to another related topic that so many have asked me to write about this week.

This year, 5775, is and has been the year of Shemita or the Sabbatical year which as we know comes with the command to allow the land to rest. In addition to this Mitzvah of not working the land and the sanctity which rests upon the fruits of this year, the Torah commands us as to the cancellation of loans. While the agricultural laws apply in the Land of Israel only, the commandment regarding cancellation of loans applies (today on a rabbinic level) both in Israel and abroad. In practical terms this means that any loan given and not paid by the end of this year, meaning at Rosh Hashana, can no longer be claimed by the lender. The example I gave in the Synagogue was if a friend asked to borrow \$500 today until his next paycheck on Friday and for whatever reason did not pay and Rosh Hashana passes, the lender can no longer demand payment.

Given the circumstances, one would imagine that anyone would be reluctant to lend anything to

another especially during the Sabbatical year. A few weeks ago we read in the Torah this exact scenario where Hashem warns us not to withhold the loan based on our fear. The Torah, rather harshly states of such a person, "and your eye shall be evil toward your needy brother."

As time passed and we were subject to one exile and were at the threshold of another under Herod and Roman rule, Hillel HaZaken saw that wealthy people refrained from loaning money to the needy during the Sabbatical year. With the poor suddenly having nowhere to turn, Hillel enacted the "Prozbul" allowing the loan to "stay on the books" and remain collectable.

The idea behind the Prozbul is that one transfers the loan to the court. Debts to the court are not cancelled by the Sabbatical year and thus one is not afraid to lend as he knows with this document he can collect his debts. Every individual can fill out a contract. Two valid witnesses then sign on the Prozbul contract in order to validate it. These contracts are usually available at your local synagogue the week before Rosh Hashana. A copy is attached to our newsletter for you.

Although the enactment of the Prozbul insinuates a criticism of the community who might be reluctant to lend without it, the entire concept of a Jewish loan is an amazing act of kindness. Remember when we borrow from a bank or on a credit card, we pay interest so that the lender benefits, sometimes greatly. A typical Jewish loan is interest free. In fact Free Loan societies have been synonymous with the Jewish people.

My father would relate to us how after returning home from duty following WWII and managing the Bibi Continental Lighting and Gift showroom in Manhattan, he saw his uncle Dave Bibi, his father Reuben and his cousin Isadore Dayan form a free loan society for the community in 1947. He told us that they modeled it on the Jewish Free Loan Association which was established in the late 1800s and still exists today.

As my dad recalled, Uncle Dave came up with the idea with the goal of "offering people in the community a one-time loan of (at the time) \$1,000,



בית דין צדק ובית הוראה "יורו משפט"
בראשות הגה"ג הרב גדעון בן משה שליט"א

Prozbul

Contract Year 5775

In front of us the undersigned witnesses _____
came and said to us:

Acquire from me a complete and binding Kinyan via a legal halachik instrument that the bet din will serve as my agent to acquire a small parcel of land that I own and transfer it to all those people that owe me debt that don't have land. *We have made this Kinyan and transfer with the legal and halachik instrument.

He also said to us:

Serve as witnesses that I am hereby transferring all debt that is owed to me to the Bet Din of religious affairs Jerusalem Israel.

Rabbi Gideon Ben-Moshe Chief Judge

Rabbi Dov Rozman Judge

Rabbi Edo Shahaar Judge

That I can collect this debt at any time.

Regarding the aforementioned we sign as witnesses today
_____ to the month of Elul 5775.

_____ Witness _____ Witness

*here one of the witnesses makes the Kinyan using either a pen or ie, hat or ie, handkerchief that he gives to the hand of the creditor.

and the borrower could use that money to start off a business, or just to tide himself over until his new business made a profit". When he was told that, "\$1,000 is a great deal of money", Uncle Dave explained that it was really minimal if starting a company. They sold the concept to others and brought in members from throughout the community who would contribute and bring in others. My father told us that they turned it into a club that people really wanted to be associated with.

He explained that the philosophy behind the society was the importance of treating the borrowers as "customers". And although the idea was to pay back when they could, everyone had to go through all the motions of a typical loan. There had to be a co-signer, the co-signer had to be someone from the community, and all parties had to sign. Other than that, the fund operated on trust. People paid back at their own pace, some quickly and others less so.

During the recovery from Super storm Sandy I had the opportunity to be part of a free loan process. We matched donors with recipients helping people get their businesses back on their feet or re-secure mortgages after repairs. One very scary loan was for \$150,000 with \$50,000 coming from three different synagogue memberships in town. It was a huge responsibility. I am so glad to say that every loan was interest free and every loan was paid back and so many people had the opportunity to do this misvah and make a substantial interest free loan changing other people's lives. A big part of me wishes we could have continued the idea in the Long beach/Five Towns area as I see a huge real need for small micro loans which would give people the opportunity to start their own small businesses and make substantial changes in the lives of their families.

Halacha Yomit notes that: Many pious men and women have the custom that at the end of the Shemita year after they have already filled out a Prozbul, to loan an amount of money to a friend in order to perform the Mitzvah of cancelling debts at the conclusion of the seventh year. When one loans the money to a friend, one must specifically tell him/her that the money is to be repaid before Rosh Hashanah. The borrower should hold off on repaying the debt until after Rosh Hashanah though. Then, when the borrower comes to repay the debt after the Shemita year has passed (the day after Rosh Hashanah), the lender should tell the borrower, "I release the debt". Then, if the borrower nevertheless wishes to repay the loan, he should reply, "I would nevertheless like for you to accept this money as a gift" and the lender may then accept it if he wishes. Our Sages said that one who does not repay debts

that were cancelled by Shevi'it is not looked favorably upon.

So give someone a loan today. Even if they don't pay back, you'll be the better for it.

Let's close with a great story told by Avi Shulman. I hope it's a recent story and the thought imbedded is still imbedded in our children. Three young boys gather to play Monopoly one Sunday afternoon. They continue the same game after school on Monday and then again on Tuesday afternoon. The father of one of the boys asks his son why the Monopoly game is taking so long. The father explains that usually in just a few hours someone goes bankrupt. The boy turned to his father and answered, "Someone went bankrupt, but we opened up a Gemilut hasadim (free loan society) and loaned him money!"

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

PS: Attached is the PROZBOL FORM. An important Halachic requirement for lenders, in order to maintain their receivables as this Shemita Year concludes with the onset of Rosh Hashana next week at sundown Sept 13th 2015.

Guidelines:

- The law of Shemitat Kesafim (Debarim 15:9) mandates that all outstanding loans, which are already due, are cancelled with the end of the Shemita year. As the current year (5775) is Shemita, outstanding debts will be cancelled with the onset of this Rosh Hashanah, at sundown on September 13, 2015
- The Talmud tells that the sage Hillel established a system to circumvent this law so potential lenders will not be discouraged from extending loans as the Shemita year approached. Namely, the lender formally transfers his loans to a Bet Din, and they thus are no longer subject to Shemitat Kesafim, which applies only to debts owed to private individuals.
- The lender signs a special document called a Prozbul declaring the transfer of his debts to Bet Din, and has two witnesses sign the document, as well. This may be done at any time during Elul, either by day or by night. Signing this document allows the lender to collect his debt after the end of Shemita.
- The document does not have to be presented to Bet Din, but it should preferably identify the Bet Din to which the loans are transferred, with the three judges named.

- As long as the Prozbol was signed during Elul, loans granted after the signing may be collected after Rosh Hashanah, because loans are not due before thirty days after they are given (unless the parties stipulate otherwise), and thus loans granted during Elul are not subject to Shemitat Kesafim. Attached to this email is the Prozbol form in English. Please use it and as above, keep it filed. Provided by Torah Learning Resources, The Edmond J Safra Synagogue in Brooklyn NY, and Rabbi Eli J Mansour, The Edmond J Safra Synagogue of Aventura and Rabbi Galimidi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Ki Tavo - Tochacha and a renewed covenant with Hashem

- 1- Bikurim
- 2- Viduy maasrot (a confession that one gave his necessary tithes)
- 3- Moshe tells Benei Israel the mitsvot should be fresh to us like we received them today and reminds them we are Hashem's treasured nation
- 4- The mitsva of setting up the 12 stones and inscribing the Torah on them
- 5- The commandment to assemble on har grizin and har eval for a renewed acceptance that those who follow the mitsvot will be blessed and those that don't will be cursed
- 6- The blessings and tochacha (rebuke) of what will be if we do or don't follow the mitsvot
- 7- Moshe tells Benei Israel to remember all Hashem has done for us in Egypt and the midbar and thus we should make sure to keep this renewed covenant

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"That you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground." (Debarim 26:2)

Our perashah begins with the misvah of Bikurim. After the land was conquered, farmers were to take the first ripened fruits to the Bet Hamikdash and present them to the Kohen, in a ritual that included a moving declaration of gratitude to Hashem for all that Hashem has given him and declaring Hashem's eternal role as the guide of Jewish history.

Rabi Moshe Feinstein zt"l asks that it seems strange that the farmer must give the first fruits to the Kohen. The farmer loves these fruits that were the first to ripen after all his hard work. The Kohen really doesn't view these fruits in any special way. They are like any other fruits to him. This seems like a loss for the farmer to give them to the Kohen. He answers that the farmer needs to realize that the true owner of the fruits is Hashem and the Kohen accepts

the fruit on behalf of Hashem. The farmer should realize that it is only right to celebrate this happy occasion of the new fruits with the main Owner.

What we learn from this is that Bikurim is an expression of gratitude. The main point for a person to feel gratitude is to realize that what he has is a gift and it's not his. Imagine if a wealthy man takes a homeless man and gives him a house. He gives him a car. He gives him his daughter in marriage. He gives him a running business. Will this man have any difficulty feeling gratitude to that person? Of course not. We, like the farmer, many times feel that what we earned or acquired is ours. Therefore, it is a big job to feel true gratitude to Hashem. The moment we feel that what we have is truly Hashem's we feel a tremendous feeling of gratitude. That's the reason the farmer gives the fruits to the Kohen, because he is actually giving the fruits to Hashem, the Owner. Rabbi Reuven Semah

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

The Torah lists a long string of misfortunes that may befall the Jewish people (G-d forbid). Indeed, some of the events mentioned in these curses are very tragic and have happened to our nation throughout history. The reason given for this harsh conduct by Hashem against us is that we did not serve Hashem with happiness.

The Ari z"l gives this verse a twist and learns it in a novel fashion. The reason for these curses is that when we did not serve Hashem, we did it with happiness, which means that when we were doing sins, we did them with a good feeling rather than with regret and remorse.

This has to teach us that not only our actions count but even our attitudes while doing these actions. If we end up doing something wrong, we have to feel badly even while doing it so that it's not considered as if we did the wrong thing with happiness. One of the methods of following this advice is by doing misvot with happiness. If we feel good when doing the right thing, even if we sometimes fall and do the wrong thing it will not be with joy but with reluctance and hopefully regret. That way we will tend to increase those things which we associate with happiness, which are the misvot, and stay away from those things which we are doing without happiness! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Keys to Success

Joseph had a deadline to meet. He left home early enough to beat traffic and be the first at work, hoping to take advantage of the early-morning calm to complete his project. But now, standing in front of the office building, he feared his planning and

diligence had been for naught: the entrance was locked!

As Joseph stood in the street, wondering what to do, Freddy, the janitor, arrived to unlock the doors.

"Am I glad to see you!" Joseph exclaimed.

The custodian removed a giant key ring from his belt and began to search for the right key. Struggling not to appear impatient, Joseph made a feeble attempt at small talk. "That's an awful lot of keys for one man to carry around!" he observed.

"It shows you how important I am, and just how much the boss depends on me," retorted the pompous caretaker.

This glimpse at the janitor's image of himself as indispensable to his employer made Joseph stifle a smile. He did a mental tally of the managers, supervisors, and skilled employees who really drove the company and added to the bottom line. The boss depended on all of them much more than he depended on the man with the keys!

Most people assess their own value based on externals, which, of course, don't really add inherent value to an individual. I am reminded of an important meeting between two principals of two huge corporations for the purpose of discussing a proposed major joint venture. Before the scheduled time, representatives from each company arrived at the conference room carrying laptops, cell phones, beepers, files, and BlackBerry devices and began to set up at the conference table. Some wore very expensive garb; some also sported status timepieces and accessories. At the exact moment that the meeting was scheduled to begin, the two principals walked in almost simultaneously. They were simply and neatly dressed and carried nothing into the meeting – except themselves. They did not need any externals to prove their importance. Without their presence, knowledge, and power, the meeting would not go on.

Don't bother gathering external props to impress others. Don't strive to be the man with the key ring. It only takes a minute to get yourself together. If you fill your potential, you can possibly "get in"...even though you don't hold the keys. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

**Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
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Thanking God, Thanking People**

Parashat Ki-Tavo begins with the Misva of Bikkurim, the requirement to bring one's first fruits to the Kohen in the Bet Hamikdash. A farmer who grew any of the seven special species would tie a thread around the first fruits that ripened, and then bring them to the Mikdash. Before giving the basket of fruit to the

Kohen, the farmer would recite a special declaration, called Mikra Bikkurim, in which he recalled how Laban tried to destroy Yaakov, and how Beneh Yisrael were subjugated in Egypt and were ultimately rescued by God. It is only in the final verse of Mikra Bikkurim that the farmer made mention of the fruits which God had given him.

The question arises, why does the Torah require a farmer to recall the history of Am Yisrael, dating back to the time of Yaakov Abinu? It is understandable that one should be required to bring a gift and express his gratitude for a successful yield. But why does the Torah require him on this occasion to contemplate the ancient history of the Jewish people?

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

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

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

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

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

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

At that moment, I realized that the man's outward piety was insincere. A person who cannot feel gratitude for something that was done for him right

before his eyes cannot possibly feel genuinely grateful to God, whom he does not see. We cannot reach the lofty level of feeling grateful for God for all He does for us until we have achieved the more basic level of recognizing and feeling grateful for the kindness we receive from the people around us. If we fail to show gratitude to a devoted wife, to a hard-working husband, to a loving parent, to a diligent employee, or to helpful neighbors, then how can we possibly show gratitude to God?

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

Rabbi Wein THE SUNSHINE PATRIOTS

The Jewish communities and individual Jews living in the Diaspora, in the United States and the Western world particularly are currently faced with having to make a difficult and almost fateful decision regarding the signing of an admittedly bad deal with Iran. As this would pave the way for that nation to become a nuclear power in the very foreseeable future, does continued Jewish opposition to the deal contribute to Jewish interests worldwide?

To put the matter more boldly and painfully, is it right and necessary to advocate a Jewish interest over the national policy of governments of nations where Jews are citizens but are only a rather small minority?

There is no question that Iran is not only an enemy of the State of Israel but that it openly and repeatedly declares that its intention is to wipe the Jewish state off the face of the world map. Experience, bitter experience, has taught the Jewish people that we should take these threats at face value. Enabling Iran, with the blessings of the West, to possess nuclear weapons is an existential threat to the survival of the State of Israel.

Even Thomas Friedman, never noted for his favorable reviews regarding Israel generally and

Netanyahu personally, has written that if he were living in Israel he would have just cause for concern over this deal with Iran. So now the moment of test and truth has arisen for American Jewry. Its loyalty to the policies of the United States and especially its blind faith in President Obama and the Democratic Party is well known and proven over the past electoral cycles.

In the face of the Hobbesian choice now presented before it, American Jewry has split badly. And this split reflects not only policy regarding Iran but reveals the deeper divide that exists within American Jews and the conflicts that this rift engenders.

J Street has been exposed as being the anti-Israel lobby that it always was from its inception. The fact that it is now headed by a Moslem woman only contributes to the comedic façade of it somehow attempting to defend Jewish interests and the State of Israel. Now it naturally defends the Iranian deal at all costs.

A substantial number of Reform rabbis have written the American Congress to express their support for the Iranian uranium and nuclear deal. These people have always proven themselves to be socially liberal first and, at best, Jewish second. Reform was a bitter opponent of Zionism until the Six Day War and their DNA still contains vestiges of their great slogan of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that "Berlin is our Jerusalem!"

They blithely believe that they are safe and that their fate and future is somehow not tied up with the State of Israel and its welfare and security. Their own long road of encouraging assimilation, intermarriage and a religion of radical liberalism have brought them to this state of self deception. Whatever they do stand for, they do not stand for the Jewish people!

The Orthodox world has its own anti-Jewish detractors. The ferociously anti-Zionist factions within Orthodoxy, while not necessarily espousing support for the Iran deal, proclaim that Jews have no right to publicly oppose the policy of President Obama and the United States government.

The problem with these groups is that the main tenet of their faith is to deny and decry the existence of the State of Israel. They allowed this issue - and this issue solely - to define their society and their behavior. No recital of realistic facts, no empiric observation of the realities of the Jewish world today will change their minds, policies or behavior. They are the ultimate true believers. And their belief in Judaism is somehow obsessively founded on their dismay and disappointment that the Jewish state has

arisen and is successful.....and will always remain controversial. So they are anti-Israel first and Jewish second.

All of those who are Jewish second, who are sunshine patriots and not willing to stand up for the Jewish people in unpopular circumstances, are always judged harshly in Jewish history. In 1933, the Orthodox Jewish rabbinate in Germany sent a letter of congratulations to Adolf Hitler when he assumed the post of the Chancellor of Germany.

Reading that letter today, in perfect historic hindsight, makes one weep. But as Lincoln said, "we should not judge lest we be judged." But there is no question in my mind that Jews throughout the world will be judged by history as to their reaction to this Iranian nuclear deal.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Pursuit of Joy

Happiness, said Aristotle, is the ultimate goal at which all humans aim.[1] But in Judaism it is not necessarily so. Happiness is a high value. Ashrei, the closest Hebrew word to happiness, is the first word of the book of Psalms. We say the prayer known as Ashrei three times each day. We can surely endorse the phrase in the American Declaration of Independence that among the inalienable rights of humankind are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But Ashrei is not the central value of the Hebrew Bible. Occurring almost ten times as frequently is the word simcha, joy. It is one of the fundamental themes of Deuteronomy as a book. The root s-m-ch appears only once in each of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, but no less than twelve times in Deuteronomy. It lies at the heart of the Mosaic vision of life in the land of Israel. That is where we serve God with joy.

Joy plays a key role in two contexts in this week's parsha. One has to do with the bringing of first-fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem. After describing the ceremony that took place, the Torah concludes: "Then you will rejoice in all the good things that the Lord your God has given you and your family, along with the Levites and the stranger in your midst" (26:11).

The other context is quite different and astonishing. It occurs in the context of the curses. There are two passages of curses in the Torah, one in Leviticus 26, the other here in Deuteronomy 28. The differences are notable. The curses in Leviticus end on a note of

hope. Those in Deuteronomy end in bleak despair. The Leviticus curses speak of a total abandonment of Judaism by the people. The people walk be-keri with God, variously translated as 'with hostility,' 'rebelliously,' or 'contemptuously.' But the curses in Deuteronomy are provoked simply "because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart out of the abundance of all things" (28:47).

Now, joylessness may not be the best way to live, but it is surely not even a sin, let alone one that warrants a litany of curses. What does the Torah mean when it attributes national disaster to a lack of joy? Why does joy seem to matter in Judaism more than happiness? To answer these questions we have first to understand the difference between happiness and joy. This is how the first Psalm describes the happy life:

Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners or sat where scoffers sit. But his desire is in the Torah of the Lord; on his Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, bearing its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in all that he does he prospers. (Ps. 1:1)

This is a serene and blessed life, granted to one who lives in accordance with the Torah. Like a tree, such a life has roots. It is not blown this way and that by every passing wind or whim. Such people bear fruit, stay firm, survive and thrive. Yet for all that, happiness is the state of mind of an individual.

Simcha in the Torah is never about individuals. It is always about something we share. A newly married man does not serve in the army for a year, says the Torah, so that he can stay at home "and bring joy to the wife he has married" (Deut. 24:5). You shall bring all your offerings to the central sanctuary, says Moses, so that "There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and rejoice in all you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you." (Deut. 12:7). The festivals as described in Deuteronomy are days of joy, precisely because they are occasions of collective celebration: "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the strangers, the fatherless and the widows living among you" (16:11). Simcha is joy shared. It is not something we experience in solitude.

Happiness is an attitude to life as a whole, while joy lives in the moment. As J. D. Salinger once said: "Happiness is a solid, joy is a liquid." Happiness is something you pursue. But joy is not. It discovers you. It has to do with a sense of connection to other

people or to God. It comes from a different realm than happiness. It is a social emotion. It is the exhilaration we feel when we merge with others. It is the redemption of solitude.

Paradoxically, the biblical book most focused on joy is precisely the one often thought of as the unhappiest of all, Kohelet, a.k.a. Ecclesiastes. Kohelet is notoriously the man who had everything, yet describes it all as hevel, a word he uses almost forty times in the space of the book, and variously translated as 'meaningless, pointless, futile, empty,' or as the King James Bible famously rendered it, 'vanity.' In fact, though, Kohelet uses the word simcha seventeen times, that is, more than the whole of the Mosaic books together. After every one of his meditations on the pointlessness of life, Kohelet ends with an exhortation to joy:

I know that there is nothing better for people than to rejoice and do good while they live. (3:12)

So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to rejoice in his work, because that is his lot. (3:22)

So I commend rejoicing in life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and rejoice. (8:15)

However many years anyone may live, let him rejoice in them all. (11:8)

My argument is that Kohelet can only be understood if we realise that hevel does not mean 'pointless, empty, or futile.' It means 'a shallow breath.' Kohelet is a meditation on mortality. However long we live, we know we will one day die. Our lives are a mere microsecond in the history of the universe. The cosmos lasts for ever while we, living, breathing mortals, are a mere fleeting breath.

Kohelet is obsessed by this because it threatens to rob life of any certainty. We will never live to see the long-term results of our endeavours. Moses did not lead the people into the Promised Land. His sons did not follow him to greatness. Even he, the greatest of prophets, could not foresee that he would be remembered for all time as the greatest leader the Jewish people ever had. Lehavdil, Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime. He could not have known that he would eventually be hailed as one of the greatest painters of modern times. We do not know what our heirs will do with what we leave them. We cannot know how, or if, we will be remembered. How then are we to find meaning in life?

Kohelet eventually finds it not in happiness but in joy – because joy lives not in thoughts of tomorrow, but in the grateful acceptance and celebration of today. We are here; we are alive; we are among others who share our sense of jubilation. We are living in God's land, enjoying His blessing, eating the produce of His earth, watered by His rain, brought to fruition under His sun, breathing the air He breathed into us, living the life He renews in us each day. And yes, we do not know what tomorrow may bring; and yes, we are surrounded by enemies; and yes, it was never the safe or easy option to be a Jew. But when we focus on the moment, allowing ourselves to dance, sing and give thanks, when we do things for their own sake not for any other reward, when we let go of our separateness and become a voice in the holy city's choir, then there is joy.

Kierkegaard once wrote: "It takes moral courage to grieve; it takes religious courage to rejoice." [2] It is one of the most poignant facts about Judaism and the Jewish people that our history has been shot through with tragedy, yet Jews never lost the capacity to rejoice, to celebrate in the heart of darkness, to sing the Lord's song even in a strange land. There are eastern faiths that promise peace of mind if we can train ourselves into habits of acceptance. Epicurus taught his disciples to avoid risks like marriage or a career in public life. Neither of these approaches is to be negated, yet Judaism is not a religion of acceptance, nor have Jews tended to seek the risk-free life. We can survive the failures and defeats if we never lose the capacity for joy. On Sukkot, we leave the security and comfort of our houses and live in a shack exposed to the wind, the cold and the rain. Yet we call it zeman simchatenu, our season of joy. That is no small part of what it is to be a Jew.

Hence Moses' insistence that the capacity for joy is what gives the Jewish people the strength to endure. Without it, we become vulnerable to the multiple disasters set out in the curses in our parsha. Celebrating together binds us as a people: that and the gratitude and humility that come from seeing our achievements not as self-made but as the blessings of God. The pursuit of happiness can lead, ultimately, to self-regard and indifference to the sufferings of others. It can lead to risk-averse behaviour and a failure to 'dare greatly.' Not so, joy. Joy connects us to others and to God. Joy is the ability to celebrate life as such, knowing that whatever tomorrow may bring, we are here today, under God's heaven, in the universe He made, to which He has invited us as His guests.

Toward the end of his life, having been deaf for

twenty years, Beethoven composed one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, his Ninth Symphony. Intuitively he sensed that this work needed the sound of human voices. It became the West's first choral symphony. The words he set to music were Schiller's Ode to Joy. I think of Judaism as an ode to joy. Like Beethoven, Jews have known suffering, isolation, hardship and rejection, yet they never lacked the religious courage to rejoice. A people that can know insecurity and still feel joy is one that can never be defeated, for its spirit can never be broken nor its hope destroyed.

[1] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1.

[2] Journals and Papers, vol. 2, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 493

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL Preparing For Yom Hadeen/Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashana is the Yom Hadeen, a day of danger, of great peril. One more Mitzvah or one less sin could tip the scales in our favor. If you are a 'benoni', if your mitzvot and sins balance each other, then Hashem allows you to wait until Yom Kippur before your judgment is sealed. In that case, whatever remains to be done, you do on Yom Kippur. But in most cases the very greatest effort should be on Rosh Hashana. That is the day when we hope to be written and sealed immediately for a successful year. If that is the day for doing Teshuva, repentance, why shouldn't we say 'al chet', and mention our sins, all day long?

It is more fundamental to understand the great principles included in the words 'Hashem Melech'- The Dominion of Hashem! Not only when you sit and say it in the siddur, but even when you walk in the street, you must think 'Hashem Melech', Hashem is King. Practice up on it during weekdays. Every day for a minute or two, as you walk in the street, think 'Hashem Melech';
Hashem is in charge of the World !

He is looking at me every second; He is thinking of me. Then Hashem says: You are fulfilling the purpose of Rosh Hashana, and when Rosh Hashana comes and we shout Hashem Melech, it brings forth that potential greatness that we stored up in our minds all year. It bursts forth from our lungs:
"Hashem Melech, Hashem Malach, Hashem Yimloch L'Olam Va'ed"

Long before Rosh Hashana we have to work on this great concept and to realize that Hashem is Watching us, to know that the whole world is filled with His Glory. That is our great preparation for the Yom Hadeen. Quoted from "Rabbi Avigdor Miller Speaks" ArtScroll

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