

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TABO

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 60:1-22

SEPTEMBER 9, 2017 18 ELUL 5777

**DEDICATION: Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther
in memory of Yosef ben Ovadiah Bibi 19 Elul
and in memory of David ben Yishak Mizrahi**

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY RUBY !

EDITORS NOTES

I am sitting on the top floor of a building in the center of Jerusalem looking out at a flurry of construction activity with so many cranes dotting the skyline towering over an ever expanding sea of building sites. And the scene is repeated in cities throughout Israel. Buildings are going up for those living here and buildings are going up for those arriving from the diaspora.

I shouldn't be here this week. I rushed here at the last moment for one reason and was blessed as a result to be here for a moment in time, unimagined.

Last night I witnessed a miracle in the ancient city of Jerusalem. In the spring of the year 697 BCE, that's two thousand, seven hundred and fourteen years ago my father's father was exiled from this city to Babylon with the King Yechonia by Nebuchadnezzar while my mother's father along with many other kohanim were forcefully taken and eventually found themselves in the city of Aleppo. They remained in those places for 2600 years before making their way to the Goldene Medina and the shores of America.

And last night history changed.

We read this week of the threat of punishment and exile for not serving Hashem with joy and a good heart. But with the darkness of exile comes a promise: "The L-rd your G-d shall return your captivity and have mercy on you, and will return and gather you from all the nations amongst whom the L-rd your G-d has scattered you" (30:3).

Last night my father's father and my mother's father who were forced from their homes and held a dream of returning saw from their seats in the academy in Heaven the culmination of that dream. A baby was

born in Jerusalem in a place called shaarei sedek or the gates of righteousness, fulfilling a promise and prophecy Moses made 3289 years ago.

Think about it. Imagine the two of them, the father of my father and the father of my mother on the road out of Jerusalem. The two of them, a prince and a priest, passing Rachel's Tomb with tears in their eyes and the tears must have continued as they arrived along the rivers of Babylon where they dwelled and cried. We are told that tears and prayers can create a new reality. Those tears created that alternate reality culminating in the little girl born on the 16th of Elul in the year 5777 to my daughter Mikhayla and my son in law Daniel. These two took it upon themselves against the advice of everyone and I mean everyone to leave their country, their places of birth, and their family homes in order to return home to the land Hashem promised to Abraham. This baby's birth was truly a miracle in countless ways but coming this week in a portion which begins with the words Ki Tavo El HaAretz – when you come to the land, at least for me, brings Moses promise to fruition.

We thank Hashem from the bottom of our hearts with tears in our eyes and smiles on our lips as we say shehechyanu vekiyemanu vehigianu lazeman hazeh. Blessed is Hashem Master of the Universe who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion. Mazal Tov to Daniel's parents Harry and Laurie Reidler and Grandpa Moses Baruch.

I thank my wife who was absolutely amazing showing super human strength although she had just been released from the hospital with what we learned last night was a threatening case of Salmonella poisoning. She was truly there for every minute of seventeen hours of labor. She is the face of eshet chayil displaying the valor of every Jewish mother and wife.

I also want to thank my dear friend for 50 years, Charles Zalta for being up in the middle of the night for any text getting me to Israel at the last minute with planes sold out to students coming to study for the year. Nobody is better than Whiz Travel! And thanks to my friend Shaul Nakash and his brother in law Joey Mansour for putting me up with no advanced notice in their beautiful and convenient Herbert

Samuel Hotel across the street from my daughter in the center of everything in Jerusalem – You can email Trips@Jordache.com for a friends and family discount. When you get to the hotel, tell Du Du, I say hello! Its truly an undiscovered gem.

And a special thanks to our Jerusalem family. When you come to a place and have no blood relatives, it's a gift to have amazing friends who prove that often the bond of friendship is unparalleled. Serge and Nina Muller are truly our brother and sister and no task or request is beyond them. We love them dearly and wish Nina a Happy Birthday today.

And finally to Daniel, a trooper who truly showed what he is made of under the intense pressure of the last week and had everything under control to the point that when I arrived it was only to be here for this wonderful occasion. And to Mikhayla who developed an intense love of this land, and decided she wanted to be a part of this land, the land of Israel and the Jewish people. Yes, I still harbor hopes that she come back to be with her siblings, her nieces and nephews, her aunts and uncles and her grandmothers. But who knows, maybe we'll all follow her here sooner than later. That's what Hashem promised and Hashem always keeps His word!

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

As this past week we commemorated the Yahrzeit of the Ben Ish Chair and as we will commemorate the Yahrzeit of my Great Grndfather who passed away, 90 years ago, I repost this from. My great grandfather Joseph A Bibi lived an amazing but very tough life. His story is told in the book Nouri. The following is reprinted from my notes of 14 years ago, from September 2003.

Choose life in order that you may live ... you and your descendants.

Obviously, the decisions of our parents, grandparents and great grandparents and the paths they chose as they came to the many forks along the road of their lives, become part and parcel of who and what we are today. There is this thread that binds the generations. Often the thread though present, is invisible to the naked eye. Sometimes though the thread becomes intensely seeable and we can swear that we perceive the messages from our ancestors in the world beyond. Its at these times when we start to realize that just as that thread tugs from them to us, it also tugs from us to them. Their souls are effected by

our actions too and sometimes those in heaven remind us of this fact loud and clear.

Last Sunday I returned home with the kids from an outing to the Bronx and our visit to the house that Ruth built - Yankee Stadium. Taking a three year old and a five year old to a crowded baseball game might be considered a lesson in self-torture, but we all had a nice time thanks to Aryana's help. Even my wife enjoyed her first game in 10 years. But after fighting traffic back to the island and then running some errands, I was in need of some quiet time.

But quiet time was not to be found in a house filled with my sons friends enjoying the Sunday ritual of simultaneously watching as many football games as possible while playing John Madden X Box at the same time. Football in addition to the rest of the kids going through their sundry activities led me to flee. I went through the bookshelf and took sefer Ben Ish Chai and went out to the car. My chevrutah Michael and I were discussing possibly doing a weekly internet Ben Ish Chai class. The car with the top down in the pre autumn evening would be a great place to catch up on my learning in quiet solitude.

As I opened the car door, the phone was ringing, but I missed it. Caller ID said it was my brother Victor. I tried calling back, but could not get through. So I went through the Ben Ish Chai's comments on this week's portion. When I finished, I tried Victor again and he told me that he had to tell me an incredible story. And he had no idea that I had been reading in the car for the better part of the last hour.

He told me that he had given a class earlier that day. For 20 years Victor had been learning and teaching from the Ben Ish Chai, but he had not done taught a Ben Ish Chai class in the past few years. The yahrzeit of the Ben Ish Chai fell out during the preceding week (13 Elul), so Victor decided to begin a new series of classes on the Ben Ish Chai. And although Victor is usually very low key, he said that he gave a class that explained the depth and width of Hacham Yosef Chaim's greatness. He went on even beyond his usual hour and spoke for 80 minutes realizing he did not even begin to touch upon what he intended to speak about. He discussed with passion, the prominence of this eminent scholar and sadik in kabalistic and halachic matters.

As one point one of the Rabbis stepped into the class and mentioned to Victor out of the blue that Hacham Ovadiah Yosef was writing a book similar to Halichot Olam on Rav Pealim - a sort of critique on and showing his opinions in difference to those of the Ben

Ish Chai. With his usual humility and wit, Victor sidestepped the comments with charm and humor.

After the class, although he intended to pray in one Synagogue on East 8th, for some reason he went to the Ahi Ezer. There was an areyat - a memorial service. And there was a young man, one of Nouri Dayan's grandchildren, walking around showing a 150 year old sefer that was a gift (perhaps half a century ago) to Rabbi Yaakov Maslaton z'l, the brother of Rabbi Murad Maslaton z'l. He then mentioned to Victor, "Come with me, I have another book to show."

He brought him into the library and handed him an original printing of Ben Ish Chair from 1898. What an incredible coincidence to be handed this sefer shortly after giving a class on the Ben Ish Chai. And imagine that this was an original printing from when the Ben ish Chai was alive. Then he turned to the cover page and beheld the name of the original owner. Written there was, Yosef Ovadiah Bibi! The book belonged to our great grandfather who passed away seventy five years ago. And more than that there were passages underlined, there were stars as well as notes in the margins. It is fairly certain that our great grandfather and his father were at least acquainted with the Ben Ish Chai. But now there was proof that our great grandfather was also a student of the Ben Ish Chai's writings as well.

Victor had to feel as if the Ben Ish Chai was saying to him, "You gave a class and defended and spoke up for me and my opinions with pure and intense passion, now let me give you a gift in return."

And there's more to it. Victor had been studying that morning in the Ben Ish Chai, the laws of returning a lost object - the physical and spiritual aspects of the subject - and here was Heaven returning this sefer (the physical) and more so, (the spiritual) the enlightenment that the book had been studied by his great grandfather.

But that's not all. The next morning when Victor told my father the story, my father as usual was able to provide the punch line. That final fact that puts it all together. Perhaps not only was Hacham Yosef Chaim speaking to my brother, perhaps our great grandfather was speaking to all of us too. We learn that the actions of the children can have a beneficial effect on our ancestors in heaven; our actions can be the interest payments that they continually collect. And through those actions the souls of the departed are elevated in heaven each year on their yahrzeit. And then my father told him that that night, the 19th of Elul, was the yarzeit of Yosef Ovadiah Bibi.

PS A few months back I was traveling on business and coincidentally met a well known Rabbi from the community. For the couple of days I was there I was able to learn with the Rabbi each morning and evening. At one point we were discussing the laws of hadlakat neyrot - lighting candles - on Friday night from Yalkut Yosef of Chacham Ovadiah Yosef. I noted that the opinion here was in contrast to the opinion of the Ben Ish Chai. In fact there was often disagreement between them. So I asked the Rabbi a question. For our community where there is such a strong connection between Halacha and Sod, who do we follow when there is a machloket (difference of opinion) between Yalkut Yosef and The Ben Ish Chai? His answer was very simple. Chacham Ovadiah is the Posek of our generation and when it comes to practical Halacha it is very dangerous to pick and choose. So unless there is a specific tradition from your father, grandfather or great grandfather that the customs of the Ben Ish Chai were practiced by them, one would be best off these days simply following the guidance of Chacham Ovadiah.

It's interesting that often traditions are handed down as an oral masoret from generation to generation and traditions handed down orally often come with a bit of confusion and debate hence the thousands of pages of the Talmud where the Rabbis spent generations discussing and debating over the oral traditions of their predecessors.

At times in order to help set aside questions and debates for future generations, oral traditions need to be put in writing. Again let us refer back to the Talmud written for just such a purpose. The Rabbi I spent those two days with mentioned, "unless there is a specific tradition from your father, grandfather or great grandfather".... well I guess there was another message in this story, our great grandfather was sending a message to his descendants who might have questions and his message was in writing and as unambiguous as you can get.

Summary of the Perasha

During these weeks of selichot we recite the 13 midot quite often. The 13 midot (i.e., Adokai, Adokai Kel rachoom ve'hanun....) were revealed to us when Hashem forgave Benei Yisrael for the sin of the golden calf. The gemara in Rosh Hashana (Daf 17) explains Hashem told Moshe that in the future if Benei Yisrael ever need forgiveness they should "ya'asoo lefanay ke'seder ha'zeh" (they should do like this) and Hashem told Moshe the 13 midot. And simply said these are the words that by saying them

should invoke Hashem's mercy. And that is why we recite the 13 midot so many times. But if we look closely at the words it says that we should "ya'asoo" (i.e., do) like these words. What does that mean? One of the 613 mitsvot is "ve'halachta bidrachav" that we should walk in the ways of Hashem, that we should act and be like Hashem. Some understand that Hashem was telling Moshe that if we want to merit forgiveness we have to start portraying the midot of Hashem. We have to be slow to anger (with our spouse and children and employees and others). We have to be more compassionate like Hashem (by taking an interest in the lives of the people around us). We have to be more forgiving of others mistakes.... And so maybe when saying the 13 midot we can have kavana that we are proclaiming to Hashem that I want to be a better a person! I want to be a more kind, more patient, more compassionate person. We are reminding ourselves of the type of person we want to be. Maybe that is one of the reasons we say these words so many times. To remind ourselves what matters. To instill in ourselves the right priorities. What matters is if I am a good person. Do I think of others? Do I make time for others that need help or am I am too busy with my day to day life? So maybe that can be one of our thoughts when we say these words of the 13 attributes of Hashem. I want to be better!

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 Mitsrayim and the Midbar and thus we should make sure to keep this renewed covenant

**FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE
"And follow His ways." (Debarim 28:9)**

The Midrash Eliyahu Rabbah states in relation to this verse, "Follow His ways" – that is the ways of Heaven. Just as the ways of Heaven are merciful, so shall you be merciful to one another.

Rabbi Yeruchem Olshin, Rosh Yeshivah of Lakewood Yeshivah, was once asked to speak at the occasion of the appointment of a new Rabbi at one of the Lakewood shuls. Rabbi Yitzchak Hisiger quotes this beautiful speech of Rabbi Olshin.

A Jew of Europe of old visited various Torah giants to receive their advice regarding what a kahal should look for when seeking a Rabbi and what the primary job of a Rabbi is.

The first to be approached was Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, author of Aruch Hashulhan. He explained that the job of a Rav is primarily to rule on halachic matters, answering questions presented to him by the members of his kahal.

Next to be asked was Rav Itzele Peterberger, noted student of Rav Yisrael Salanter and early leader of the musar movement, who served as Rav of St. Petersburg. Rav Itzele responded that the job of a Rav is to administer rebuke and musar, which is moral discipline, to the congregants.

When asked this question, the Netziv, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, Rosh Yeshivah of the Volozhiner Yeshivah, said that the job of a Rav is to spread and teach Torah to his followers.

When Rav Chaim Brisker was approached with this query, he asked if other great leaders had been consulted and what they had answered.

"Yes," he was told. "Rabbi Epstein said the Rav must answer halachah questions." Rav Chaim seemed to disagree. "It is incumbent on every Jew to learn the halachah for himself. In response to Rav Itzele, he said every Jew must learn musar. In response to the Netziv, he said every Jew is required to learn and study Torah.

So what, he was asked, is his opinion of the job of a Rav?

"Above all," said Rav Chaim, "The job of a Rav is to help bear the burden of his congregants' problems, taking their needs to heart and listening to their worries. He must agonize over that which troubles them and truly empathize with them. That is the job of the Rav. To follow in the ways of Hashem and be merciful. Rabbi Reuven Semah

After all the curses and punishments that are written in our perashah, the Torah says that this will happen if we don't serve Hashem with joy and happiness when we are blessed with everything. The Rabbis tell us that doing misvot without happiness means it's a burden and a chore, and eventually people stop doing what is a bother.

The Midrash points out another aspect about being happy. There was once a king whose son was not behaving properly and the king wanted to punish him. However, every time it was time to receive his punishment, the boy would smile and show such happiness at being with the king that the king could

not bring himself to hurt his son. When we show that we are happy being the children of Hashem, He becomes filled with love for us and wants to send us berachah from heaven. Especially in our times, when people worry about the future and there are so many long faces around, this is the time we should remember this lesson. We should try to think about positive aspects of our lives and smile and be happy. This will spark within us a greater feeling of joy which will continue to make us feel good and accomplish more. And happiness is contagious, so others will become inspired and encouraged when they see us happy and content, and this could only have a greater ripple effect on those around us. So let's be happy and smile, and let's see the results. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Fitting It All In

Time management is a skill that you are not born with – it must be learned. Life Coach Avi Shulman tells about an interesting demonstration that he saw at a time-management training session. The instructor poured a pile of everyday items onto a table: cassettes, books, shampoos and cosmetics, articles of clothing, and small appliances. He then began to fill a suitcase with all the items on the table, but after a few items were put in, the case was full and most of the “stuff” was still on the table.

The instructor then started over by categorizing. Certain items could be combined, others could be eliminated, and others could be sent another way or at another time. The instructor then packed the most important items first, and the next most important followed, until the case was full. After all was said and done, some of the less important items were still left on the table.

The lesson is clear. The twenty-four hours in the day have the same finite limits as the suitcase. Just as there is a physical limit as to how much can be packed into a given space, so, to, there is only so much that can be done in a day. The trick is to identify priorities and to do them first before going on to the next task.

When you start your day, don't get overwhelmed by all that you think you must accomplish. List your tasks and then prioritize. List the most important items first. Prioritizing may take only a few minutes, but it will help you succeed in getting to the items that are most important to making your day successful. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Reading the Curses**

Parashat Ki-Tabo is famous for the section known as the “Tocheha,” which describes the Kelalot (curses), the horrific calamities that threaten to befall Beneh Yisrael if we forsake God's commands. A similar section appears earlier in the Humash, in Parashat Behukotai, toward the end of the Book of Vayikra.

The Gemara notes a number of differences between the two sections. One difference is that the curses in Parashat Behukotai were dictated by God, whereas the curses here in Parashat Ki-Tabo were initiated by Moshe. Of course, God agreed with every letter, and it was thus all included in the Torah. But the curses in this Parasha were originally said by Moshe, and not by the Almighty.

At first glance, it seems very strange that Moshe would compose such horrific curses. Moshe Rabbenu was always our nation's greatest advocate, interceding to God on our behalf and trying to secure a favorable judgment for us. It seems “out of character” for Moshe to warn of such dreadful and frightening catastrophes.

To understand Moshe's intent in formulating these curses, let us first consider another comment of the Gemara. The Gemara teaches that Ezra, the leader of the Jewish people at the beginning of the Second Temple era, instituted that the curses of Parashat Ki-Tabo should be read every year in the final week or two of the year, before Rosh Hashanah. The reason, the Gemara explains, is “Tichleh Shana U'kelaloteha” – “the year should end along with its curses.” We read the curses when the year ends to express our hope that just as the year is coming to an end, the curses that threaten us should likewise come to an end.

How does reading the curses help us ensure that they will end?

We might compare reading the curses to other forms of reading and study, such as studying about the Korbanot, the sacrifices brought in the Bet Ha'mikdash. Even without a Mikdash, when we cannot offer Korbanot, we can still gain access to the power and effects of the sacrifices by learning about them. This is why we include the Korbanot section in our daily prayer service. By learning about the sacrifices, we are considered as though we have actually offered them, and we thus gain the advantages of sacrifices despite our inability to place animals upon the altar. This applies to the Kelalot, as well. When we study the dreadful curses in this Parasha, we are considered to have actually experienced them – even though we have not actually gone through this suffering. Reading and

learning the Kelalot is thus very beneficial for us, as it helps us avoid having to actually endure them. Even if, Heaven forbid, we are deserving of suffering, we can study this section in lieu of punishment.

This is why Ezra had us read the Kelalot right before Rosh Hashanah. As we stand in judgment before God, we can tell Him that even if we have sinned and failed, we should be considered as having already endured punishment, since we've read and studied the curses of Parashat Ki-Tabo. This is why many great Sadikim listen very intently to the reading of the Kelalot, keenly aware of just how powerful and beneficial this study is.

And this might be why Moshe Rabbenu wrote these Kelalot in the first place. He was not trying to curse us, but to the contrary, to help us avoid calamity. He gave us this section for us to carefully read and study, so that we can be regarded as having endured this suffering and thereby earn atonement. The section of the Tocheha offers us the remarkable opportunity to achieve atonement for our sins without having to experience calamity and hardship. It is thus an invaluable asset, and an expression of immense love on the part of Moshe Rabbenu, who gave us this section to learn and probe as a means of averting calamity.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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Rabbi Wein

DISTRACTIONS AND DIVERSIONS

We are all aware that our best laid plans and visions of our future are upset when life itself intervenes. We are always blindsided by unforeseen events. We are prone to be distracted and diverted by rather petty, small and even inconsequential events. The great issues that face and even bedevil the Jewish people and the Jewish state rarely receive the attention that they obviously deserve.

A great deal of this is due to the media frenzy and instant social media communication that characterizes our current society and generation. The constant necessity to produce news – fake or otherwise – drives the crushing creation of distractions and diversions. And these sideshows mesmerize us and we forget what our true goals and policies should be.

We are invested in scandals, personal failures and rumors, and the great issues are ignored. There is no doubt that a price will be exacted for this failure. The history of the past two centuries in Jewish life worldwide shows clearly the perils of ignoring great ideas while concentrating on passing controversies. When Reform and Haskalah were attracting generations of children of previously staunchly Orthodox families, the Orthodox leadership generally ignored the underlying causes for the success of these movements and contended themselves with bans and posters. Instead they argued about women's education, secular studies, modes of dress, personal rabbinic disputes and controversies and other issues, most of which have long been completely forgotten. Seeing only the trees and never viewing the forest is always a dangerous policy.

There is currently a controversy here in Israel about the kosher status of a certain type of chicken species. Imported from Belgium, this type of chicken was approved as being kosher by a leading charedi kashruth certification organization, one of the more renowned groups here in Israel. However, as can be expected in any type of kashruth question and innovation, there is always another rabbinic opinion.

And the other well-known rabbinic kashruth authorities declared that this type of chicken was not acceptable. The media had, and continues to have, a field day regarding this controversy. As is usual in such instances, families have been split, dishes have been discarded and destroyed and the poster wars have been renewed and intensified.

This is very reminiscent of the rabbinic dispute in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries regarding the newly discovered American turkey. For almost a century, the controversy regarding this bird continued until the Jewish people, by practice, decided that the American turkey was just a big chicken and therefore a kosher bird, as it is universally accepted today.

I have no idea what the eventual Jewish decision regarding the fate of the Belgian chicken in our kitchens, but like most disputes of this type, I expect this controversy to continue for some time. But the fate of the Belgian chicken and the attention that it is receiving is a distraction. The real issue that the rabbinate should be dealing with is education, outreach and adjustment to modern changes, which are the stuff of today's important issues.

The existential issues facing the Jewish people and the State of Israel are unfortunately numerous and serious. Iran is the Hitler of our time and cannot be ignored. The Jewish people and its religious

leadership have to prepare their societies for this looming crisis. Iran is not a matter of Belgian chickens.

Demonstrations against the Israel Defense Forces are not only foolish and wrong but they are completely irrelevant to the Jewish future. The complete alienation of so much of the Jewish people certainly has to be addressed. But one hears very little from the top about this danger, which is certainly as existential as Iran is. The Talmud allows for questions to which it has no answers. Even without having answers to problems, the problems themselves should be raised, addressed and discussed.

We are wasting assets and valuable resources on distractions and diversions. Our leadership, as well as all of us, must somehow rise over this and concentrate on the real issues and problems that face us. But we are very attracted to these diversions. We prefer to play with the toys that are strewn throughout our daily lives. It is much easier to avoid the real issues than to face up to them. At the very least we should be able to identify and reject these confusing disturbances

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

In two sentences in this week's sedra, the Torah summarises the entire relationship between God and the people of Israel:

You have affirmed [he-emarta] this day that the Lord is your, God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments and rules, and that you will obey Him. And the Lord has affirmed [he-emirkha] this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people who shall observe all His commandments. (Deut. 26:17-18)

Here, set out with disarming simplicity, is the dual relationship, the reciprocity, at the heart of the covenant. It is an idea made famous in the form of two jingles.

The first, that of William Norman Ewer:

How odd

Of God

To choose

The Jews

And the second, the Jewish riposte:

Not quite

So odd –

The Jews

Chose God

Between God and the people is a mutual bond of love. The Israelites pledge themselves to be faithful to God and His commands. God pledges Himself to cherish the people as His treasure – for though He is the God of all humanity, He holds a special place in His affection (to speak anthropomorphically) for the descendants of those who first heard and heeded His call. This is the whole of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The rest is commentary.

The English translation, above, is that of the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh. Any translation, however, tends to conceal the difficulty in the key verb in both sentences: *le-ha'amir*. What is strange is that, on the one hand, it is a form of one the most common of all biblical verbs, *lomar*, “to say”. On the other, the specific form used here – the *hiphil*, or causative form – is unique. Nowhere else does it appear in this form in the Bible, and its meaning is, as a result, obscure.

The JPS translation reads it as “*affirmed*”. Aryeh Kaplan, in *The Living Torah*, reads it as “*declared allegiance to*”. Robert Alter renders it: “*proclaimed*”. Other interpretations include “separated to yourself” (Rashi), “chosen” (Septuagint), “recognised” (Saadia Gaon), “raised” (Radak, Sforno), “betroted” (Malbim), “given fame to” (Ibn Janach), “exchanged everything else for” (Chizkuni), “accepted the uniqueness of” (Rashi to Chagigah 3a), or “caused God to declare” (Judah Halevi, cited by Ibn Ezra).

Among Christian translations, the King James Version has, “Thou hast *avouched* the Lord this day to be thy God”. The New International Version reads: “You have *declared* this day that the Lord is your God”. The Contemporary English Version has: “In response, you have *agreed* that the Lord will be your God”.

What is the significance of this unique form of the verb “to say”? Why is it used here? The use of language in the Torah is not vague, accidental, approximate, imprecise. In general, in the Mosaic

books, *style mirrors substance*. The way something is said is often connected to *what* is being said. So it is here. What we have before us is a proposition of far-reaching consequence for the most fundamental question humanity can ask itself: What is the nature of the bond between human beings and God – or between human beings and one another – such that we can endow our lives with the charisma of grace? The answer given by the Torah, so profound that we need to stop and meditate on it, lies in *language, speech, words*. Hence the singling out, in this definitive statement of Jewish faith, of the verb meaning “to say”.

We owe to the later work of Wittgenstein, developed further by J. L. Austin (*How to do things with words*) and J. R. Searle (*Speech Acts*), the realisation that language has many functions. Since the days of Socrates, philosophers have tended to concentrate on just one function: the use of language to describe, or state facts. Hence the key questions of philosophy and later science: Is this statement true? Does it correspond to the facts? Is it consistent with other facts? Can I be sure? What evidence do I have? What warrant do I have for believing what I believe? Language is the medium we use to describe what is.

But that is only one use of language, and there are many others. We use it to classify, to divide the world up into particular slices of reality. We also use it to evaluate. “Patriotism” and “jingoism” both denote the same phenomenon – loyalty to one’s country – but with opposite evaluations:

Patriotism = good, jingoism = bad.

We use language to express emotion. Sometimes we use it simply to establish a relationship. Malinowsky called this *phatic communion*, where what matters is not what we say but the mere fact that we are talking to one another (Robin Dunbar has recently argued that speech for humans is like “grooming behaviour” among primates). We can also use language to question, command, hypothesise and imagine. There are literary genres like fiction and poetry which use language in complex ways to extend our imaginative engagement with reality. The philosophical-scientific mindset that sees the sole significant function of language as descriptive – taken to an extreme in the philosophical movement known as “logical positivism” – is a form of tone-deafness to the rich variety of speech.

The Mosaic books contain a deep set of reflections on the nature and power of language. This has much to do with the fact that the Israelites of Moses’ day were in the place where, and the time when, the first alphabet appeared, the proto-semitic script from which all subsequent alphabets are directly or indirectly derived. Judaism marks *the world’s first transition on a national scale from an oral to a literate culture*. Hence the unique significance it attaches to the spoken and written word. We discover this at the very beginning of the Torah. It takes the form of the radical abandonment of myth. God *spoke* and the world came into being. There is no contest, no struggle, no use of force to subdue rival powers – as there is in every myth without exception. Instead, the key verb in Genesis 1 is simply *leimor*, “God said [*vayomer*], Let there be . . . and there was.” *Language creates worlds*.

That, of course, is Divine — not human – speech. However, J. L. Austin pointed out that there is a human counterpart. There are certain things we can create with words when we use them in a special way. Austin called this use of speech *performative utterance* (more technically, illocutionary acts). So, for example, when a judge says, “This court is now in session”, he is not *describing* something but *doing* something. When a groom says to his bride under the wedding canopy, “Behold you are betrothed to me by this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel”, he is not *stating* a fact but *creating* a fact.

The most basic type of performative utterance is *making a promise*. This is the use of language to *create an obligation*. Some promises are unilateral (X commits himself to do something for Y), but others are mutual (X and Y make a commitment to one another). Some are highly specific (“I promise to pay you £1,000”), but others are open-ended (“I promise to look after you, come what may”). The supreme example of an open-ended mutual pledge between human beings is marriage. The supreme example of an open-ended mutual pledge between human beings and God is a covenant. That is what our two verses state: that God and the people of Israel pledge themselves to one another by making a covenant, a relationship brought into existence by words, and sustained by honouring those words.

This is the single most radical proposition in the Hebrew Bible. It has no real counterpart in any other

religion. *What is supremely holy is language*, when used to create a moral bond between two parties. This means that the supreme form of relationship is one that does not depend on power, superior force, or dominant-submissive hierarchy. In a covenantal relationship both parties respect the dignity of the other. A covenant exists only in virtue of freely given consent. It also means that between Infinite God and infinitesimal humanity there can be relationship – because, through language, they can communicate with one another. The key facts of the Torah are that [a] God speaks and [b] God listens. The use of language to create a mutually binding relationship is what links God and humankind. Thus the two verses mean: *“Today, by an act of speech, you have made God your God, and God has made you His people”*. Words, language, an act of saying, have created an open-ended, eternally binding relationship.

Hence the name I have given to my series of Torah commentaries: *Covenant and Conversation*. Judaism is a covenant, a marriage between God and a people. The Torah is the written record of that covenant. It is Israel’s marriage-contract as God’s bride. Conversation – speaking and listening – is what makes covenant possible. Hence the dual form of Torah: the written Torah, through which God speaks to us and the Oral Torah through which we speak to God by way of interpreting His word. *Judaism is the open-ended, mutually binding, conversation between Heaven and earth*.

Despite the deep influence of Judaism on two later faiths, Christianity and Islam, neither adopted this idea (to be sure, some Christian theologians speak of covenant, but a different kind of covenant, more unilateral than reciprocal). *There are no conversations between God and human beings in either the New Testament or the Koran* – none that echo the dialogues in Tanakh between God and Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Jonah, Habakkuk and Job. Judaism, Christianity and Islam – the religion of sacred dialogue, the religion of salvation and the religion of submission – are three different things. The use of language to create a moral bond of love between the Infinite and the finite – through covenant on the one hand, conversation on the other – is what makes Judaism different. That is what is set out simply in these two verses: *Speaking a relationship into being, le-ha’amir*, is what makes God our God, and us, His people

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

“Step 1 to Teshuvah: Realizing how much Hashem has done for you”