

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

## SHOFTIM

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 51:12-52:12  
 SEPTEMBER 10, 2016 7 ELUL 5776

**DEDICATIONS: By Jack Azizo in memory of his mother, Mrs. Lilly Azizo a"h, Latifah bat Miriam**  
**In memory of Florence Deutsch 5 Elul**  
**In memory of Florence Safdieh 11 Elul**  
**In memory of Rebecca Maslaton Bibi 12 Elul**

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### Editors Notes

#### From the Archives August 2008

As we enter the month of Elul, I recall Rabbi Abittan reminding us that the wise person always prepares before an event, while the fool who neglected to prepare laments afterwards over his misfortune. In our class last week we talked about the roads a person can choose in life. Most often choosing the difficult path at the beginning secures a rich and rewarding destination while those that look for the easy path at the outset often find themselves locked in a never ending entanglement of thorns and difficulties later on.

I was reminded of a story that the Rabbi would tell after reading a column by Rabbi Yisrael Pesach Feinhandler this week. Two American Jews who were business partners once complained to Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandel that their sons were about to marry gentile girls. Although not observant, they were distraught, since they knew that marrying gentiles meant that their sons would be lost to Judaism.

Rabbi Weissmandel asked them, "Where did you educate your sons?"

"We lived in a remote town," answered the two partners, "and there was no shul or Hebrew school, so we had to send them to public school."

Rabbi Weissmandel sighed and said to them, "Your sons learned with gentiles, and now you come to complain that they wish to marry gentile girls? Let me tell you about something that happened after the First World War, and perhaps this story will shed light on your own situation.

"As we know, after the War new boundaries were drawn for many countries. In one Jewish village, the

new border separated the village from the Jewish cemetery, so that the village was in Poland, while the cemetery was in Russia. Every time it was necessary to bury someone, they had to ask for a permit to cross the border.

"This caused great inconvenience and delayed each burial for several days until the proper papers could be arranged. The Jews wished to remedy this intolerable situation, and sent a delegation to the regional governor with the request that he exempt the Chevra Kaddisha from all the red tape so that they could bury their dead quickly. The governor listened to their plea and agreed to grant them a permit to cross the border whenever necessary.

"Once the Chevra Kaddisha had this permit, they decided to utilize it for other purposes as well, such as to smuggle goods across the border. They would fill a coffin with smuggled goods, cover it with a tallis, and pretend that they were carrying a corpse. On the other side of the border, they had people waiting to receive the smuggled goods. In this way they developed a successful trade for themselves.

"Once one of the border policemen noticed that at the time the funeral procession was crossing the border with the coffin everyone was laughing. He became suspicious and suspected that perhaps this was not a funeral at all. He approached them and asked them to open the coffin so that he could see the dead body. They immediately refused, claiming that this would be against Jewish law.

"But the policeman would not relent, and demanded that they open the coffin.

"Now the Chevra Kaddisha realized they were in deep trouble, since if they were caught, not only would their lucrative trade come to an end, but they were also in danger of being exiled to Siberia. Knowing that they were trapped, they burst into tears.

"The policeman said to them, 'You fools! NOW you are crying? If you would have cried when you were carrying the coffin, it would not be necessary for you to cry now.'

"The same applies to you," concluded Rabbi Weissmandel. "If you would have cried when you sent your sons to learn with gentiles, then you would not have reached this situation, and you would not be crying now."

Rabbi Weissmandel knew and Rabbi Abittan always tried to caution us that one can educate a child only when he is still young and willing to listen, but when that opportunity passes and he reaches adulthood, it is usually too late. We must utilize the early years to train our children to know the difference between truth and falsehood and between right and wrong. We must instill in them the concept of "Who is a wise man, One who can see what the results of his actions will be".

A child who learns that taking the tough road now, working in school, studying, exercising, and developing proper midot, requires work. The child needs to understand that the thorny path often leads to roses, while the rosy path often leads to thorns.

As we mentioned last week, Hashem tells us that he sets before us a blessing and a curse, and a life and death, and we should choose life. We asked, "isn't this obvious"? But the answer lies in the fact that to arrive at blessings and life, we must be willing to work, to sacrifice, to sweat and to cry. If we do that now, then we won't have to later!

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

### Summary of the Perasha

Perek 20, Pasook 1, in this week's Parasha says when you go out to war against your enemy and you see they outnumber you and are more equipped than you, "lo tirah me'hem", don't be afraid, "because Hashem is with you". The Rambam learns from here that one is not allowed to be afraid. And seemingly being afraid is a sin because it is a lack of trust in Hashem. It is showing that we don't believe Hashem can protect us. And so something we can work on (myself especially) is anytime time we are afraid, whether it be a concern in business or with our children or with life in general, and we feel ourselves getting nervous or anxious is to stop and say Hashem is taking care of me. I trust in Hashem. I am not nervous because I know Hashem will help me and do what is best from me.

### Shoftim - Mitzvot relevant to establishing a society (judges, kings, war) in Israel

- 1- The mitzvah to appoint judges and law enforcers. An individual who worships avoda zara. The rebellious elder.
- 2- The mitzvah to appoint a king in Israel. Halachot of a king
- 3- Benefits and obligations of the Leviim
- 4- A kohen who desires to serve not during his assigned time. The mitzvah not to use sorcery, witchcraft or other avoda zara to learn the future.
- 5- Hashem sends us prophets (in place of sorcery used to learn the future). Laws regarding cities of refuge
- 6- Edim zomemin (false witnesses). Laws when Israel goes to war (who goes to war).
- 7- Laws when Israel goes to war (offering peace, who is killed), egla arufa

### FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities."

In our perashah the Torah gives the formal command that courts be established in every city of the land of Israel. In addition to judges, the Torah requires the appointment of officers of the court who would have the responsibility to enforce the decisions of the judges.

Our Sages teach that there is an important hint in the pasuk we quoted. It could be read, "Judges and officers you shall place upon you," meaning, make sure that when you appoint judges you accept their authority on you, not only on others. Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells of an imaginary conversation with a fictitious family, that could happen.

Moshe's son Yossi, who is sixteen years old, has been continuously bringing up the topic of getting an iPhone. After telling him repeatedly that it's unacceptable and having him stalk away in tears, his parents, Moshe and Sarah, have decided to sit down with him and try to explain what their objection to this instrument stems from. They feel he's old enough to accept their decision in a mature way.

"Yossi," his father began, "Mommy and I would like to discuss the iPhone thing with you." Yossi looked surprised. Until now it had simply been, "No," with no discussion, and, while he assumed his parents would still not bend, a slight ray of hope sprang up in his heart. "Dad," Yossi interrupted, "you said you want to discuss it with me. Does it mean I'll have a chance to talk or are you just going to say what your objection is?"

"Yes," Sarah said. "We want very much to hear you. In fact," she glanced at her husband, "we

really only have one thing to say and after that we are all ears."

Moshe took over. "The bottom line is that the Rabbis have said it is assur and therefore any argument in its favor has already been overruled."

"Mom, Dad," he began after a couple of moments, at the point when he felt he could speak without dissolving into a torrent of tears, "I have something to say but I have to know in advance that you will let me finish and not call me disrespectful or punish me for what I say." "Go ahead," said Moshe. "I won't get into trouble?" "No." "No matter what I say?" "We promise."

"Ok then, I would like to know why you're holding me to a higher standard than you hold yourselves."

"What do you mean?" asked Sarah. "What I mean is that Mom, you don't obey the Rabbis. They have said that fitted clothing is inappropriate." "Yossi!" Moshe burst out, but his wife cut him off. "We said we'd hear him out, and we will," she said firmly.

"Mom, almost all of your skirts are tight and we all know it. Do you think I don't see? Why don't you obey the Rabbis? And Dad, what about your computer? You never upgraded the filter that we all know how to get through, even though the Rabbis say without a proper filter, the internet is absolutely assur. Do you consider what I'm thinking when I walk into your study and you suddenly hit a button on your computer? But I should obey the Rabbis and not get an iPhone? Do we listen to the Rabbis or not?"

The room was as silent as an unplugged computer. Sarah had tears in her eyes and Moshe was looking down. The truth hurts. It doesn't have to! Rabbi Reuven Semah

### **"Justice, justice shall you pursue." (Debarim 16:20)**

We know that every word in the Torah is important, and teaches us a lesson. If so, why does the Torah repeat the word עָרַם - justice? Isn't it sufficient to say עָרַם; «שָׁרֵי־תִּישָׁרֵם - pursue justice?"

One of the commentaries learned from here a very important lesson. We have to read the pasuk as if it says עָרַם; «שָׁרֵי־תִּישָׁרֵם עָרַם - pursue justice with justice." That means that it's not enough to have the ultimate goal of justice. We must achieve these goals using justifiable means. The ends do not justify the means. Just like it is obvious to all that we cannot steal money and "kosher" it by giving it to charity, so too with other misvot. When we are involved in our prayers in shul, we shouldn't be disturbing others by praying too loudly or talking to our friends. We shouldn't be promoting peace with some people by hurting others in the process. In

every area of serving G-d we would do well to learn the lesson: Pursue justice using means of justice. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **Heat Wave**

The temperature rises and the temperature falls, and people react differently to the changes. When living in a temperate climate, you must expect variation as the seasons change. But you can't control the weather.

Some people love when it gets really hot, and others can't stand the heat but love the cold. Those who prefer hot to cold, or vice versa, must expect to feel comfortable during many days of the year.

In contrast to the extreme cold of winter and the humid, hot days of summer, spring and fall offer moderate temperatures. It is then that you can dress, go out and play, travel, or relax comfortably throughout the day. This should tell you something about extremes.

The advertising world works on selling the public on a client's product by feeling the pulse of the masses and capitalizing on their idiosyncrasies. Recently, marketing experts have latched into the pulse of the public and determined that the jaded society we live in needs extremes to enjoy life. Extreme physical pursuits such as sky-diving and high-speed racing have been translated into "extreme" deodorants and "extreme" power bars and drinks.

Our Sages, on the other hand, teach that life is not only more satisfying when you behave in a moderate mode, but also that this is what the Torah prescribes for our behavior patterns. "One should take the middle road," says Maimonides, "and not go to the extreme" (Hilchot Deot 2:2). Generosity and stinginess each have drawbacks when taken to an extreme, and the same is true of mercifulness and cruelty or any other character traits.

When it comes to observance of Torah commandments extreme is acceptable, but when it comes to character traits the best course is the middle course.

You might find yourself over-reacting. Instead, keep yourself on track; don't drive yourself off the road. "Extreme" may be a concept they are trying to sell right now, but it takes a Torah perspective to redirect yourself to the safer lane in the middle of the road. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR The Ends and the Means**

The Torah in the beginning of Parashat Shofetim speaks about the judicial system, and it famously

exhorts, "Sedek Sedek Tirdof" – "You shall pursue justice."

The Gemara raises the question of why the Torah found it necessary to repeat the word "Sedek" (justice) in this verse. What message does the Torah seek to convey with this additional emphasis?

The Gemara explains that the additional word "Sedek" teaches that when choosing a Bet Din (Rabbinical Court) for settling a dispute, one should select the court with the greatest expertise and highest professional standards. The Torah instructs us not only to settle our legal disputes in an established Bet Din, but to ensure to choose the most qualified Bet Din available.

There is, however, an additional reason for why the Torah repeats the word "Sedek" in this verse – to teach us that must not sacrifice "Sedek" in the pursuit of "Sedek." Many people set for themselves lofty, noble objectives, but act ignobly in their pursuit of those objectives. The Communists, for example, sincerely believed that their movement would solve the world's problems and create a utopian society. And this conviction led them to slaughter an estimated 15 million people in the process of promoting and establishing Communist rule. They felt that the lofty end of equality justified the violent means of bloodshed and warfare. They pursued "Sedek," but ignored "Sedek" in the course of this pursuit.

The Torah does not subscribe to this belief that "the ends justify means." From the Torah's perspective, the means must be as kosher as the ends.

When God appeared to Moshe at the burning bush and instructed him to return to Egypt and lead Beneh Yisrael to freedom, Moshe initially refused to accept the mission. One of the reasons for his refusal was his concern for the feelings of his older brother, Aharon. Moshe had been away from Egypt for many years, during which time Aharon had been serving as spiritual leader, tending to the many needs and hardships facing the people. If Moshe would suddenly return to Egypt and present himself as leader, this might trouble Aharon and offend him. God assured Moshe that Aharon, in his selfless piety, would actually rejoice upon hearing of Moshe's appointment as leader.

If we analyze Moshe's situation a bit more closely, we learn a very powerful lesson about the ends and the means. Moshe was offered the sacred mission of leading Beneh Yisrael out of Egypt to become God's nation, and taking them to Mount Sinai, where he

would be the one to bring them the Torah and spend forty days personally learning the Torah from God. Yet, he was prepared to forfeit this opportunity because of the infinitesimal chance of possibly offending his brother. This was undoubtedly a lofty goal – can we think of any loftier goal? – but it was not worth the expense of offending somebody, or even the risk of possibly offending somebody.

We may not act wrongly to do something right. We must never trample on "Sedek" in the pursuit of "Sedek."

Our Sages teach that the one who arrives first in the synagogue for the Minyan gets as much credit as everyone in the Minyan combined. But if a person gets there first by pushing and shoving, or by speeding or parking illegally, then he does not get any credit. The person who shows up last gets more credit than him. And the same is true about finances. Unfortunately, we often hear of people involved in financial scandals who try to justify their corruption on the basis of the large sums of charity they donate from their ill-begotten gains. This is reminiscent of the Robin Hood system of stealing from the rich to give to the poor. The Torah absolutely rejects such an approach. It requires "Sedek Sedek Tirdof" – pursuing righteous goals through righteous means.

The road to justice must pass through justice; a noble end does not justify unjust means. Our determination to do great things must never lead us to compromise our values in the process. We must pursue "Sedek" only through the means of "Sedek."

### VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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### The Three Pillars By: Rav Michael Susman

Our Parsha begins by establishing the authority of Judges and Officers (Shoftim v'Shotrim) within the emerging national entity of Am Yisrael. The scope of their authority is quite extensive, and, at least according to one opinion in the Midrash (Sifrei 154) as quoted by Rashi, (17:11) we have an obligation to follow the dictates of the Sanhedrin even if their ruling contradicts the normative Halacha. On the surface, this suggestion is surprising, to say the least. Are we truly meant to ignore what we know to be true and follow an erroneous ruling of Sanhedrin?

Ramban appears to agree with this approach, defending it on the grounds that it is a necessary accommodation to prevent fissures and machloket within the nation. We accept the ruling of Sanhedrin, because failure to do so would lead to unending debate and strife. Ramban seems to adopt the approach famously articulated by American Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson: "they are infallible because they are final".

Not surprisingly, there are other opinions, beginning with the Yerushalmi (Horiyot 1:1) and adopted by various Rishonim regarding how to interpret this passuk, which enjoins us not to waver from their (Sanhedrin's) rulings "either to the right or to the left" so that it does not suggest that Sanhedrin was mistaken in their ruling. These commentators suggest that it is only in cases where it appears to us that the court had erred that we need to follow their dictates. However, in a situation where it is undisputable that a mistake has been made, there is no obligation to follow the ruling of the Sanhedrin. Nonetheless, the very fact that a mainstream opinion, and arguably the mainstream opinion, understands the verse as commanding us to follow the words of the Sanhedrin even when they are mistaken, clearly demonstrates the latitude that Chaza'l were willing to consider for the authority of the judges.

There is a fascinating suggestion made by Abarbanel (quoted and expanded upon by Rav Yehuda Cooperman in his book *Kedushat Peshuto Shel Mikra*) which seeks to blend the two approaches quoted above. Abarbanel posits that the laws of the Torah are general in nature (*Mishpetai haTorah hem kollim*) and they are therefore not suited to confront every situation which might arise. This principle is so fundamental, says Abarbanel, that blind adherence to legal principles in the Torah could lead to catastrophe. As an example Abarbanel cites the difficulty that pure halacha presents in attempting to convict a murderer. If a violent society were to rely upon pure Torah principles to enforce the law this would have catastrophic consequences. Therefore, says Abarbanel, the Torah provides a judicial escape hatch whereby the Sanhedrin can decree and enforce laws which, while technically at odds with Halacha, in fact reflect true Torah and Halachik values. This flexibility is what the Midrash alludes to when it says to follow the Sanhedrin's dictates to the right or left. Even when the cold halacha says "left", one must still follow the dictates of Sanhedrin to go "right", as that is the behavior which will preserve the true Torah principle (of "left").

The Parsha's interest in the legal system which is to be implemented upon entering Eretz Yisrael does not

end with the courts. The Torah then proceeds to discuss the parameters of a monarchy which will act as the executive branch of government in the soon to be established nation. This statement is also a subject of discussion, specifically in regard to question of whether crowning a king is a command or dispensation. But either way, this passage is a second step in establishing the norms of governance for Am Yisrael.

Like Abarbanel's judges, the king, too is granted tremendous leeway in legislating and implementing laws, even if they appear to be outside the framework of normative halacha. Rabbenu Nissim (*Derashaot HaRan Derasha #11*) explicitly allows for the king to legislate laws to protect the public good, even if these laws are not in consonance with the pure halacha. As an example, he too points to the difficulties that application of the halacha regarding convicting murderers as a test case. At one point (page 442 in the *Mossad HaRav Kook* edition) he uses terms which are echoed in Abarbanel's explanation regarding judges: "that his (the king's) actions ...are to ensure that the Torah's laws and mitzvoth will be properly kept".

The Parsha then proceeds to discuss the third element in the governing structure, the role of the Navi. This idea that the Judges, King and Navi form a three pronged ruling class is stated explicitly by Ibn Ezra (18:9) who says "and once (Moshe) finishes discussing the Judge and the Priest (which opens the discussion of the King), he (now) mentions the Navi. (I am aware that our interpretation here "lumps" the Priest (Kohanim) and the King together as a single caste. Seforno (19:2) delineates them as separate groups.)

The juxtaposition of the Navi and the kosem (sorcerer) might lead us to conclude that the role of the Navi is essentially to act as a "kosher" fortune teller. After all, predicting the future is what the other nations expect of their sorcerers. However, as Rav Elchanan Samet points out in his study of this Parsha (*Iyunim B'Parshat HaShavua*, third series), such a characterization of a Navi would be woefully incomplete. In fact the Navi is an indispensable member of the "leadership team", as can be understood from even a cursory reading of the *pasukim* (18: 15-18). Moshe tells the people that Hashem will raise up a Navi like me (*kamoni*). You are commanded to listen to him (*eilav tishmaun*). Finally the Navi is no less than an emissary of God, an individual who is commanded to faithfully transmit Hashem's message to His people (*V'natati devari b'fiv, v'dibair aleihem et kol asher azavenu*). Clearly then, someone who we are commanded to listen to

and follow, whose authority is modeled upon that of Moshe Rabbeinu, our nation's first and most distinguished leader, and most importantly is a shaliach of Hashem, is more than a mere fortuneteller. He or she is an integral part of the leadership model of the nation.

The command to follow the dictates of the Navi might seem laughably obvious, but it in fact reflects a critical element of the role of Navi. If we were to approach this statement from a purely logical perspective, we would most likely assume total convergence between what the Torah commands and what the Navi says. Yet, the Gemara in Yevamot (90b) tells us that this is not the case. "Even if he commands you to transgress one of the mitzvot of the Torah, (as in the) case of Eliyahu at Har HaCarmel, you should heed him for that time." This is what is commonly referred to as Horaat Sha'a, a temporary decree.

Rambam (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 9:1-5) codifies this statement as Halacha and lays down four conditions that must be met before we agree to transgress a mitzvah at the behest of a navi, even as Horaat Sha'a. Firstly, the navi in question needs to have established his prophetic bona fides. We need to know that he is a navi. Secondly, the command to transgress is limited in duration. A navi can not change a halacha, he can merely suspend it. Thirdly, there must be a clear purpose which the Horaat Sha'a will accomplish. We need to understand what the navi hopes to accomplish by suspending a halacha. Finally, there is no dispensation under any circumstance to require that the nation worship idols.

Does a navi have autonomy in declaring a Horaat Sha'a, and if he does what might the limits of that autonomy be? Rambam, as we have seen, limits the navi's authority to cases where the rationale is clear and where there is no command to worship idols. But we can ask a more fundamental question regarding the navi's authority in this area. Can a navi declare a Horaat Sha'a on his own, or must it be commanded by Hashem? In other words, does the navi have the actual authority to suspend a halacha, or do we merely accept the word that he is faithfully transmitting a directive from Hashem to suspend the halacha., but he has no authority to change any halacha, even on a temporary basis, on his own authority.

Of the different examples of a navi declaring a Horaat Sha'a, the only one which might be on the navi's own authority would be the case of Eliyahu on Har HaCarmel who commanded that a sacrifice be brought outside the Beit HaMikdash. (Three other

cases, two cited by Rav Samet (Melachim I 20:35-37 and Melachim II 3:19) and one cited by Rav Yehuda Cooperman in Kedushat Peshuto Shel Mikra (Shoftim 6:21) are clearly situations where the navi is responding to a command from Hashem. Rav Samet presumably does not cite this case since it is an example of the navi himself transgressing, as opposed to the navi commanding someone else to transgress.) Therefore, if it turns out that Eliyahu was commanded by Hashem to bring the sacrifice, we would have to conclude that a navi has no authority to take the radical step of declaring a Horaat Sha'a on his own.

As Rav Samet details, it turns out that the question as to if Eliyahu acted on his own authority is in fact a subject of dispute. Rashi adopts the position that Hashem commanded Eliyahu to bring the sacrifice, while Radak, Ralbag and Abarbanel believe that Eliyahu acted of his own accord. (Rav Samet has difficulty determining Ramban's position, as in our Parsha Ramban seems to say that a navi must be acting on a specific command, while in Parshat Korach he seems to grant Moshe autonomy. While this apparent contradiction requires further analysis one might tentatively suggest that Moshe had a different status than other, lesser neviim.)

If we accept that a navi has autonomy to declare his own Horaat Sha'a we can see a perfect parallel between all three branches of Am Yisrael's "leadership team". The Torah grants all three significant leeway to move beyond the strictures of Halacha in order to ensure social cohesion and a Torah based society.

### **Rabbi Wein IDEOLOGY AND HUMANENESS**

I think that history, both ancient and recent, proves that ideologies by their nature are rigid, oftentimes cruel, even murderous and dangerous. Devotion to a cause, no matter how noble by its very nature, places human beings in a secondary and often expendable position. When the cause is so noble and the venture so necessary and the perceived good of the fulfillment of the ideology are so attractive and mighty, then the cost to human lives and society pales in comparison.

How many millions of lives have been lost in the last century in the quest for the fulfillment of utopian ideologies that eventually collapsed of their own weight! The great murderers of the past century – the Kaiser of Germany, the Emperor of Austria, the Balkan nationalists, Lenin and Stalin, Hitler and Himmler, Chairman Mao and Pol Pot and the radical

Islamic extremists of today – all have one thing in common – they were all ideologues.

Their efforts at enforcing and realizing their ideology in the real world brought about the deaths of untold millions. But they never had any qualms about the cost of their attempt to create the ideal society. When ideology governs, all concepts of humaneness disappear. People and individuals are merely pawns that are expendable in the great game that ideologues believe themselves to be playing. Woe to the individual that somehow disagrees with the ideology and the ideologues currently in vogue or in power.

The debris and destruction of much of the world that has occurred over the past century and is still occurring in front of our eyes is a result of ideologies that triumphed over the concept of humaneness.

One of the more startling insights into Judaism – not Jews – and Torah is an absence of ideology. There are rules and commandments, moral commitments and definitions, but there is no overriding ideology as to how society is to be formed and governed. To a certain extent, the Torah leaves that to human trial and error. Even though the great and holy prophets of Israel portray for us a world of future hope – a world of justice, equality and peace – they do not quite outline for us a certain path to bring us to that goal.

What form of government is to be instituted? Is it absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, a form of democracy – etc.? This problem troubled our great teacher Moshe at the onset of his career, when he asked God to tell him how he was to raise the Jewish people to a level of permanent greatness. Heaven demurred and did not so inform him. But when viewing that Torah in its totality, with all of its myriad commandments and instructions, the conclusion that humaneness is the overriding feature of Judaism is inescapable. The bookends of the Torah are kindness and goodness to others – to the stranger, the servant, the widow and the orphan and the otherwise defenseless. There is no ideological cause that justifies the abandonment of those principles.

In our current society, ideologies and politics have merged and sometimes form a witches' brew of controversy, strife and even violence. The worst atrocities are justified by their perpetrators as being the fulfillment of great and true ideologies. Jewish society, as well, is not free of ideologues and differing ideologies. Because of this, it is not many times as humane as it should be and as what we would wish it to be.

The rights of the workers are considered to be sacrosanct in Jewish law and life. But these rights were an expression of the humaneness of Torah and not as an instrument of class warfare and the fulfillment of dreamy economic theories. Humaneness itself is often distorted and ruined when it is converted to an overreaching ideology. Human kindness is often morphed into aggressive, coercive and even violent behavior.

The question that should always be asked regarding a seemingly humane act that one is about to commit, is it being done out of humaneness or rather is it only in furtherance of a preconceived ideology. And we should always remember that humane behavior always trumps ideology, no matter how noble and progressive we believe that ideology to be.

The principle rule of the Torah is that human life is the most precious of all commodities and overrides all other considerations. Sending children to be suicide bombers based on a warped ideology is an affront to the idea of religion and faith in the Creator. The Torah warned us that these acts and beliefs would arise. It is our task to be humane in the face of such ideological cruelty.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Greatness of Humility**

At a dinner to celebrate the work of a communal leader, the guest speaker paid tribute to his many qualities: his dedication, hard work and foresight. As he sat down the leader leaned over and said, "You forgot to mention one thing." "What was that?" asked the speaker. The leader replied, "My humility."

Quite so. Great leaders have many qualities, but humility is usually not one of them. With rare exceptions they tend to be ambitious, with a high measure of self regard. They expect to be obeyed, honoured, respected, even feared. They may wear their superiority effortlessly – Eleanor Roosevelt called this "wearing an invisible crown" – but there is a difference between this and humility.

This makes one provision in our parsha unexpected and powerful. The Torah is speaking about a king. Knowing, as Lord Acton put it, that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely, it specifies three temptations to which a king in ancient times was exposed. A king, it says, should not accumulate many horses or wives or wealth – the three traps into which, centuries later, King Solomon eventually fell. Then it adds:

When [the king] is established on his royal throne, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this Torah ... It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to be in awe of the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not feel superior to his brethren or turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time in the midst of Israel. (Deut. 17:18-20)

If a king, whom all are bound to honour, is commanded to be humble – “not feel superior to his brethren” – how much more so the rest of us. Moses, the greatest leader the Jewish people ever had, was “very humble, more so than anyone on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). Was it that he was great because he was humble, or humble because he was great? Either way, as R. Johanan said of God himself, “Wherever you find his greatness there you find his humility.”[1]

This is one of the genuine revolutions Judaism brought about in the history of spirituality. The idea that a king in the ancient world should be humble would have seemed farcical. We can still today see, in the ruins and relics of Mesopotamia and Egypt, an almost endless series of vanity projects created by rulers in honour of themselves. Ramses II had four statues of himself and two of Queen Nefertiti placed on the front of the Temple at Abu Simbel. At 33 feet high, they are almost twice the height of Lincoln’s statue in Washington.

Aristotle would not have understood the idea that humility is a virtue. For him the megalopsychos, the great-souled man, was an aristocrat, conscious of his superiority to the mass of humankind. Humility, along with obedience, servitude and self-abasement, was for the lower orders, those who had been born not to rule but to be ruled. The idea that a king should be humble was a radically new idea introduced by Judaism and later adopted by Christianity.

This is a clear example of how spirituality makes a difference to the way we act, feel and think. Believing that there is a God in whose presence we stand means that we are not the centre of our world. God is. “I am dust and ashes,” said Abraham, the father of faith. “Who am I?” said Moses, the greatest of the prophets. This did not render them servile or sycophantic. It was precisely at the moment Abraham called himself dust and ashes that he challenged God on the justice of His proposed punishment of Sodom and the cities of the plain. It was Moses, the humblest of men, who urged God to forgive the people, and if not, “Blot me out of the book You have written.” These were among the boldest spirits humanity has

ever produced.

There is a fundamental difference between two words in Hebrew: anivut, “humility”, and shiflut, “self-abasement”. So different are they that Maimonides defined humility as the middle path between shiflut and pride.[2] Humility is not low self-regard. That is shiflut. Humility means that you are secure enough not to need to be reassured by others. It means that you don’t feel you have to prove yourself by showing that you are cleverer, smarter, more gifted or successful than others. You are secure because you live in God’s love. He has faith in you even if you do not. You do not need to compare yourself to others. You have your task, they have theirs, and that leads you to co-operate, not compete.

This means that you can see other people and value them for what they are. They are not just a series of mirrors at which you look only to see your own reflection. Secure in yourself you can value others. Confident in your identity you can value the people not like you. Humility is the self turned outward. It is the understanding that “It’s not about you.”

Already in 1979 the late Christopher Lasch published a book entitled *The Culture of Narcissism*, subtitled, *American life in an age of diminished expectations*. It was a prophetic work. In it he argued that the breakdown of family, community and faith had left us fundamentally insecure, deprived of the traditional supports of identity and worth. He did not live to see the age of the selfie, the Facebook profile, designer labels worn on the outside, and the many other forms of “advertisements for myself”, but he would not have been surprised. Narcissism, he argued, is a form of insecurity, needing constant reassurance and regular injections of self-esteem. It is, quite simply, not the best way to live.

I sometimes think that narcissism and the loss of religious faith go hand in hand. When we lose faith in God, what is left at the centre of consciousness is the self. It is no coincidence that the greatest of modern atheists, Nietzsche, was the man who saw humility as a vice, not a virtue. He described it as the revenge of the weak against the strong. Nor is it accidental that one of his last works was entitled, “Why I Am So Clever.”[3] Shortly after writing it he descended into the madness that enveloped him for the last eleven years of his life.

You do not have to be religious to understand the importance of humility. In 2014 the Harvard Business Review published the results of a survey that showed that “The best leaders are humble leaders.”[4] They learn from criticism. They are confident enough to



empower others and praise their contributions. They take personal risks for the sake of the greater good. They inspire loyalty and strong team spirit. And what applies to leaders applies to each of us as marriage partners, parents, fellow-workers, members of communities and friends.

One of the most humble people I ever met was the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. There was nothing self-abasing about him. He carried himself with quiet dignity. He was self-confident and had an almost regal bearing. But when you were alone with him, he made you feel you were the most important person in the room. It was an extraordinary gift. It was "royalty without a crown." It was "greatness in plain clothes." It taught me that humility is not thinking you are small. It is thinking that other people have greatness within them.

Ezra Taft Benson said that "pride is concerned with who is right; humility is concerned with what is right." To serve God in love, said Maimonides, is to do what is truly right because it is truly right and for no other reason.[5] Love is selfless. Forgiveness is selfless. So is altruism. When we place the self at the centre of our universe, we eventually turn everyone and everything into a means to our ends. That diminishes them, which diminishes us. Humility means living by the light of that-which-is-greater-than-me. When God is at the centre of our lives, we open ourselves up to the glory of creation and the beauty of other people. The smaller the self, the wider the radius of our world.

[1] Pesikta Zutrata, Ekev.

[2] Maimonides, Eight Chapters, ch. 4; Commentary to Avot, 4:4. In Hilkhot Teshuvah 9:1, he defines shiflut as the opposite of malkhut, sovereignty.

[3] Part of the work published as Ecce Homo.

[4] Jeanine Prime and Elizabeth Salib, 'The Best Leaders are Humble Leaders', Harvard Business Review, 12 May 2014.

[5] Maimonides, Hilkhot Teshuva 10:2.

### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL Aspects of our Holy Shabbat The Source of Blessing A Sign of a covenant between Hashem & Us**

1. Hashem created the world from nothing and is in full control.

Everything is in the world because He wishes it to be.

2. A double portion of Mann (food from Heaven) fell for Shabbat (Bitachon).

The 2 hallot that we have at every Shabbat meal to remind us that the Jew

who is loyal to Hashem's mitzvot will not lose out by keeping them.

The Mann is the demonstration of Bitachon, showing that Hashem is in control.

3. Shabbat is the time to give thanks to Hashem.

We sing on the Shabbat day, "Tov Lehodot laShem." It is Good to give thanks to Hashem.

4. "Zecher leyetziat Mitzrayim" "to remind us of the Exodus from Egypt"

Shabbat commemorates the creation of Am Yisrael.

"Beni uben Benei Yisrael ot hi le'olam" Shabbat is a sign of a covenant between Hashem and us.

Think: who are you? – a goy kadosh, a holy nation chosen by Hashem

5. "Be'Shabbat nitenah Torah le'Yisrael", The Torah was given on Shabbat.

Shabbat is the glorious opportunity to accomplish something in the knowledge of the great gift

Hashem gave us-The Torah.

6. Shabbat is "Me'en Olam Haba", A preparation and a picture of Olam Haba which will strengthen our Emunah.

As you sit at your Shabbat table enjoying the delicacies of Shabbat, think about Olam Haba.

7. Hashem rested on Shabbat, "Ki bo shabat vayinafash".

And He wants that your donkey and ox shall rest.

Hashem rested, and He wants us to do the same, so that we should emulate Him.

Shabbat teaches us that Hashem desires Kindliness.

8. Oneg Shabbat – "Anyone who causes joy to himself on Shabbat, he is going to get an estate in Olam Haba that has no bounds."

Shabbat is a day to enjoy in order to know how great is Hashem's kindness to us.

And so, we have to concentrate on enjoying Shabbat in every way.

9. "The words of the Hachamim are more beloved to Hashem than the wine of the Torah itself."

The Sages added a number of decrees to our shemirat Shabbat.

Keeping 'takanot' Hachamim shows real Yirat Shamyim by demonstrating that we keep the fences built around His laws.

10. "Hashem blessed the Sabbath day"

The Jew has vacation with pay, one sixth of his life. Includes Shabbat & Holidays.

We can use this time to be with our families, talk to our children, associate with relatives

& friends, attend the synagogue for prayers and learning Torah and to hear the Rabbi speak.

11. To gain "Da'at". The most important thing in life is to gain True Knowledge.