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תנועת בני עקיבא

Bnei Akiva

of Great Britain and Ireland

1784

June 2004  
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Dear Chaverim,

Many Bogrei Bnei Akiva have contributed Divrei Torah on a range of issues, as well as on individual parshiot, in order to help perpetuate the memory of Yoni Jesner, z"l. This is a manifestation of the great esteem in which Yoni was held, and the affection that so many have for him. There can be no doubting his sphere of influence. And what better way to pay tribute to a man of Torah, who also managed to devote so much time to teaching Torah to others, than for this compilation to be produced by fellow Madrichim of Bnei Akiva for the future Madrichim of Bnei Akiva and the wider community.

We are especially appreciative of contributions from Ari Jesner, Jared Jesner and Gideon Black. We extend our thanks to the Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks for both his introduction and his D'var Torah, dedicated jointly in memory of his late Father, z"l, and Yoni, z"l.

Limmud Torah is central to Bnei Akiva's existence, and it is our hope that within this collection of Divrei Torah, there will be something for all occasions.

בברכת שלום תורה ועבודה

Mazkirut 5764

The thread that was Yoni's being, so intricately woven into the tapestry of our lives, has been callously shredded, leaving us with frayed and disjointed holes running deep through our very existence.

Yoni's life was dedicated to helping others, a task which he undertook with tremendous humility, thoroughness and gentle kindness. So many in the Jewish community relied on Yoni's talents. His approachable personality coupled with a fantastic sense of humour made him an incredible Madrich. His love of Judaism and his fellow man led him to join the Glasgow Chevrah Kadisha, to regularly read from the Torah and to often teach at the Glasgow yeshiva. Always caring for and educating others, the thread of Yoni ran deep through communal life.

His pure intellectual honesty, a characteristic often lacking today, meant that his Torah study was rigorous as he challenged convention to seek the truth. Yoni always emerged true to himself and thus victorious. He certainly raised the standard of answer many of us are willing to accept with regard to theological issues. Learning Torah with Yoni was a profound and enlightening experience.

Our ripped tapestry will always ache with the wound of Yoni's death. However, by adopting Yoni's approach and carrying it into the future we can certainly start the healing process and allow him to live on in all of us.

by Jared Jesner

office  
CHIEF RABBI

Yoni Jesner, of blessed memory, was a remarkable young man whose death at the hands of a suicide bomber devastated all who knew him. I met him in Jerusalem in January of the year he died, at a meeting of British students on a gap year in Israel. It was immediately clear that he was a natural leader, a young man of spiritual depth and moral principle whose smile and warmth drew others to him and lifted them by his example. Those who knew him loved and admired him.

In his brief time on earth, he exercised leadership in every field, especially in his community in Glasgow. He worked with the young and the old. He played a major part in the Giffnock Synagogue. A gifted student, he was always concerned to share his knowledge with others. He was one of the leaders of Bnei Akiva, and embodied its values and ideals in everything he did, and in all he was.

A life may be long or short, yet what makes it immortal is the trace we leave in others. There are those who live many years, but make little difference to the world. And there are those who are taken from us all too soon, but they change the people whose lives they touch. Yoni changed lives, by showing what it is to take responsibility, to live by the greatest principles and the highest aspirations, to go on ahead and bring others with him. He did not merely believe in Torah, Israel and the Jewish people; he showed us what it was to translate these great ideas into the way we act and relate to others.

I have chosen this particular D'var Torah (see page 24), which I wrote with the memory of my late father, of blessed memory, in mind. May it serve also as a memorial to an outstanding young man whom I and many others will never forget.



Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks







## Judaism for everyone

Yoni Jesner

*This Dvar Torah is an edited version of notes that Yoni z"l wrote on the double sedra of Nitzavim-Vayelech. In many ways it contains what he stood for in terms of Torah learning and chinuch in his short life. (Edited by Baruch Baigel)*

The sidrot of Nitzavim and Vayelech, which are often read as a double portion, have a very interesting link.

The sedra of Nitzavim begins: "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers with all the men of Israel, your children, your wives and your convert who is in the midst of your camp, from the wood chopper to the drawer of water." Every person, whatever they do in life, has an obligation to stand before God, be accountable for their actions and serve God through those actions. Whether a person is the head of a tribe or a water carrier they stand equally before God and their actions count equally before God.

It is very easy to feel that we are not capable of living a life filled with Jewish values. The water carrier, for example, may feel that he must leave it to the rabbi to learn and keep Torah. Near the end of Nitzavim the Torah tells the water carrier that this is not the case: "*Lo bashamayim hi*" – "the Torah is not in heaven", it is within the reach of all of us whatever our background, intelligence or status – it is not only the preserve of the leaders and teachers.

*Vayelech* goes further: "*Vayelech Moshe vayedaber et hadvarim ha'eleh*" – "Moshe went and he spoke these words..." Why did the Torah tell us that Moshe both "went" and "spoke"? The Torah usually says that Moshe spoke but it does not use this combination of going and speaking. The Torah emphasises to us the importance of action. Moshe did not wait for others to come to him but rather he made the first move himself. Moshe was a doer not just a talker and he teaches us that it is important to act, not just to talk. After all, we are judged on what we do, not what we say.

Nitzavim teaches us that the Torah is very much within the grasp of each and every one of us. Vayelech takes this a step further, telling us that having grasped it we must act upon it. It is not enough to talk about Torah and study it we must also do it.

Only through our actions do we show God our true feelings and intentions, so for example, on Chanuka we *light* candles, on Succot we *sit* in succot and on Pesach we *eat* matza.

As a result of each person acting and doing their part we will become a true and unified nation with each Jew playing their own important individual role.

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## The mother of all challenges

Ari Jesner

One of my favourite stories in Torah is where God consults with Avraham before destroying the cities of Sedom and Amora. It sends shivers down my spine whenever I read it. It now has even more significance as Yoni and I discussed this in one of our last conversations the week he was killed.

God reveals to Avraham his intentions towards Sedom and Amora and then God goes to see if these cities are indeed as wicked as He thinks. Avraham, understanding what is about to unfold, challenges God over his decision to destroy the cities. (Read the story at Bereshit 18, 17-33.)

I have always been so impressed by Avraham's bravery and audacity in confronting God. "...will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Avraham asks. "...far be it from You to do this thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked. Are the righteous like the wicked?...far be it from You, will the Judge of all the earth not do justice?!"

Surely it was not for Avraham to question God. Surely Avraham was supposed to say: "Wonderful idea my Lord, excellent decision",

instead of: “no actually, I don’t think so my Lord”. Is Avraham’s behaviour not totally contrary to the way religious education teaches today? Namely, don’t challenge / don’t ask questions / it’s on too high a level for you to understand / that’s just the way it is. These are some examples of the sort of non-answers we frustratingly hear too often.

To try and understand Avraham’s behaviour let’s look at the very beginning of this episode. God asks Himself: “Will I hide from Avraham that which I will do?” Why is this even a question for God? Why does God feel the need to tell Avraham anything? Avraham has no right to know God’s plans. God provides the answer: “...For I know him that he will command his children...and they will keep the way of the Lord: to do righteousness and justice...”

This is an amazing answer – given by God Himself! Avraham was in fact doing exactly what God chose him for – to fight for righteousness and justice. One chapter earlier God makes a covenant with Avraham and his descendents. Because of this covenant Avraham and his family will be fundamentally important to the way God will run the world from now on. In Parashat Bereshit we learnt that man is God’s partner in this world in a physical sense. Man is placed here to “work and keep” the earth and to procreate. But now God teaches us that man (through Avraham) is a partner in the spiritual well-being of our planet as well. God chose Avraham because he knew that Avraham and his family were committed to righteousness and justice – to the values God wants the world to live by.

God leaked his intentions to Avraham and this was Avraham’s chance to prove to God that he was indeed up to the challenge that God had chosen him for. Avraham excelled. Avraham saw that the ultimate injustice was about to take place and he takes God to task over this: “...will You destroy the righteous with the wicked? ...will the Judge of all the earth not do justice?!” Anyone else would have stood by in silence. Not Avraham. He saw evil and injustice and he wanted to correct this. This is the basis of *tikun olam* – mending the world.

The values for which God chose Avraham, righteousness and justice, are the underlying principles of Judaism. They are what God refers to as *derech Hashem*, “the way of the Lord”. We, as Avraham’s

descendants, have been charged with the task of standing up for righteousness and justice wherever we see it abused and, like our forefather Avraham, we must never be afraid to challenge those who do not “do righteousness and justice”, regardless of their status, even if that means challenging God Himself.

We must never be afraid to challenge; God expects nothing less of us. And when we do challenge (even God Himself!) and on occasion are victorious, God proclaims: “My children have defeated Me, my children have defeated Me”. However, as the Talmud tells us, God did not cry as a result of being defeated, He laughed instead. A victory for us on earth is also a victory for God in heaven. (See the incredible story of Achnai’s oven at Bavli, Bava Metzia 59b.)

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## Yoni’s final acts

Gideon Black

One of the many inspiring things we can learn from Yoni is what he did on his final morning, before Yoni and I embarked on the journey that would ultimately cost him his life.

We davened Shacharit at a shiva house. It was a Thursday morning and when we came to kariat haTorah there was nobody able to lein. Yoni stepped forward and leined V’zot Habracha flawlessly. He was fluent in much of the Torah as he leined almost weekly in Glasgow.

Then, before going to the bus station, Yoni went into a second hand book shop. Three weeks earlier he had bought a book there, and after signing a cheque with the shop keeper’s pen, he accidentally slipped the pen into his pocket. He had kept it with him all the time, just in case he would get a chance to return the pen that was not even worth fifty pence. I remember his relief after giving it back to the shopkeeper, such was his fear of denying someone what rightfully belonged to them.

Both these acts are deeply rooted in Torah values. In Kiddushin (30a) it says:

“The Rabbis taught in a Braita: The Torah says ‘VeShinantem’ which means ‘And you shall teach them’. This conveys that the words of Torah shall be sharply honed in your mouth, to the extent that if someone asks you something you will not stammer before answering, but rather you will be able to answer immediately.”

Clearly the words of Torah were sharply honed in Yoni’s mouth. He was able to lein fluently without preparation. Furthermore, while in Yeshiva, whenever I asked him to explain something that I didn’t understand in the Gemara we were learning, he would confidently clarify the issue without hesitation, but always in his very humble manner.

At the beginning of Parashat Ki Tetzei we are told of the Mitzva of returning lost items to their original owner. It did not matter to Yoni that the shopkeeper would not have noticed that his pen was missing, nor did he feel that the hassle of going back to that shop was too much to justify keeping the pen. If something is not yours, you cannot use it without permission and you have an obligation to return it. I think this is an especially important lesson to teach at machane, where we frequently ‘borrow’ our friends’ things.

Laws against theft are also extended to sleep. ‘Gezel Sheina’ is a law that forbids us from stealing other people’s sleep. At machane it can be difficult when sharing a tent with ten other people not to wake them up, particularly if you want to talk. However, we should all try to respect everyone else’s need for sleep: once stolen it can never be returned.

## Importance of education

Daniel Lightstone

Sefer Bereshit, also called Sefer Ha'avot, the Book of the Patriarchs, goes into great detail about the personalities of the Avot. *Ma'aseh avot siman lebanim* – the actions of the forefathers are guidelines for future generations and we have a lot to learn from them.

The parasha tells us that before Yaakov left to settle in Egypt with Yosef and his other sons, he sent Yehuda ahead of him to make all the arrangements. Was it not obvious to Yaakov that with Yosef being the Viceroy of Egypt he was both able and equipped to make all the necessary arrangements for his father?

The Gemara in Ketubot tells us that one may not move from a place which has a yeshiva to a place without one. We know that whichever place the Patriarchs settled in always had a yeshiva. So Yaakov – in order not to contravene the Halacha – sent Yehuda ahead of him, to establish a yeshiva in Egypt.

When Yaakov entered Egypt, the famine stopped immediately and miraculously. Pharaoh noted this and was jubilant. When Pharaoh saw Yaakov, he was shocked. The man looked so old. Pharaoh thought 'If this man dies soon, will the famine return?' So Pharaoh's first question was solely for his own interest. How long would Yaakov survive?

But Yaakov was equal to this subterfuge. He reassured Pharaoh that although he appeared old, this was due to the terrible trials he had been through. He was in fact younger than he looked.

These incidents in the lives of the Avot bring home important lessons for us. Centres for the study of Torah and the accessibility of Jewish education, are prime considerations in setting up a home.

The other lesson, so relevant in today's tumultuous world is: 'Be on your guard against the ruling power...they appear only as friends when it is to their advantage.' (Pirkei Avot).

## Who wants to be a millionaire?

Jonny Atkins

There was a Jewish boy whose mum put him on a very strict diet, thus depriving him of all his favourite foods. The boy was so happy when his parents went away on holiday for two weeks: "I can eat what I want now!" As soon as they were gone, the boy started tucking in to all the foods that his mum had forbidden.

Two weeks passed very quickly, and one bright Tuesday morning his mum returned to find her son making Havdalah in the kitchen. She asked him, "What are you doing? You only make Havdalah after Shabbat or festivals!" He looked up at his mum shyly and said, "For me, the holiday has just ended."

For Yaacov in Vayechi, the holiday had just begun. "Vayechi Yaakov Be'eretz Mizrayim – and Jacob lived in the land of Egypt." At long last after twenty-two dreadful years of mourning over the loss of his son, father and son are reunited.

However, Jacob did not simply find Joseph, he found Joseph's spiritual status intact and expanded. Even during his time in Egypt, he was still Jacob the Righteous!

Thus, Vayechi Yaakov, and Jacob "lived". When Jacob found his long lost son, Joseph, it must have been as good as, if not better than, the nachas that a son gives to his father throughout his life.

This brought home to me how important community is, and in the context of machane, going out of your way to make new friends, and not just sticking to the ones you came with.

When Jacob calls Joseph to receive his blessing, he recites the famous prayer as uttered by all Jewish children before they go to bed, and which we sing so beautifully at Seudah Shlishit, *'Hamalach Hagoel Oti'*, "The angel who redeemed me from all evil should bless the youths" (namely, Ephraim and Menashe).

The question is asked: Why does Jacob begin by blessing Joseph, but ends by blessing his sons Ephraim and Menashe?

The Zohar explains: Jacob's blessing to Joseph was that his children should be righteous. When children lead a virtuous and correct lifestyle, their parents' nachas is the greatest blessing they can wish for.

People are fascinated with the idea of winning the lottery and the prospect of instant wealth. However, we can learn from Yaakov that if we could only reflect on what we have achieved within Bnei Akiva and outside it and redouble our efforts, we might begin to realise how many of us are millionaires already.

It has been said: "We may not all be the golden chanich or madrich, but all of us are worth our weight in gold."

Dedicated to Yoni and also my grandfather Zvi ben Hechaver Ephraim

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## Unity

Udi Engelsman

So here's the story of Moshe's childhood. He gets rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, grows up in the royal palace, yet is clearly aware that he is one of Bnei Yisrael and not an Egyptian. As Moshe moves towards adulthood, he begins to feel more deeply the suffering of his people who are being oppressed and tortured. He decides to walk in the streets in order to acquire a deeper sense of what the Jews are going through. There he sees an Egyptian beating a Jew and, finding this intolerable, he looks around to make sure no one else is watching and kills the Egyptian.

The next day as Moshe is walking along on his daily stroll, he sees two Jews arguing. When he tries to break up the fight they turn to him and say: "What are you going to do about it, kill us like you did the Egyptian yesterday?" Now the story begins to get problematic. The

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pasuk clearly says that when Moshe killed the Egyptian: 'He turned this way and that and saw that there was no man'. If this is true how did all the Jews know about it?

It seems to me that there must be something a little deeper going on here. I heard a lovely explanation from one of my teachers. Throughout his teenage years in the palace, Moshe was continuously aware of what was happening to the Jews and he wanted to do something about it. He wanted to help them break free from the rule of the Egyptians and put an end to their pain and suffering. He realised that the only way this would happen was if the Jews really wanted it themselves. As such, he anticipated some sort of revolt in an attempt to overthrow the Egyptians.

Now, when Moshe went into the street and saw the Egyptian beating the Jew and he looked around, it was not to make sure no one would see him, but with the expectation that the Jew's friends would come to his rescue: Moshe "saw that there was no man", no one ready and willing to rise up in defence of a fellow Jew. In an attempt to encourage such a revolt or uprising, Moshe killed the Egyptian himself, hoping that this would stir the people to unite and revolt.

The next day, when Moshe walked in the street, what he had hoped to see was the Jews speaking about what happened yesterday and seriously discussing the possibility of resisting the oppression, of forming an army and drawing inspiration from what Moshe did the previous day. Unfortunately the plan went horribly wrong. When Moshe realised that the Jews were only arguing (possibly debating whether to revolt or not) he decided that he would run away to Midyan instead of staying in Egypt, as he realised that the people weren't ready to fight Pharaoh.

This clearly shows us the importance of unity. Whether it is a nation trying to overcome its oppressors or a shevet trying to create an atmosphere at machane, it takes unity and participation from everyone in order to really succeed. On the other hand it always takes the initiative of individuals to inspire others to join in, and to change a group of individuals into one unit that can achieve greater things.

## Sacrificing for the sake of others

Liora Cohen

In Parashat Eikev we continue to read Moshe's narrative to Bnei Yisrael recounting their travels since leaving Egypt. He is taking this opportunity to teach Bnei Yisrael and to ensure that they will follow in Hashem's ways, once they enter Eretz Yisrael. During this Parasha, Moshe talks of the rewards and punishments that Bnei Yisrael could receive, depending on the path they choose to take. There is a story that sheds light on the story of the Golden Calf. It enables us to see how the influences around us play a part in our daily lives, even though we are not always aware of them.

There was once a newly married king who discovered, within a very short space of time, that his wife was flirting with one of the servants in the palace. He became very angry and in his rage, tore up his marriage contract and banished his wife.

When the matchmaker heard what had happened, she hurried to the palace to give the king a piece of her mind. She pleaded with the king saying: "Please do not be too hard on your wife, as she was raised amongst servants. When she was talking to one of them, she accidentally used an old habit which she hadn't abandoned yet."

The king replied: "You may be right. However, I will not pay for yet another marriage contract!" As a result he commanded the matchmaker: "Pay for the document and the scribe who writes it, and then I will print my signature on it!!"

As part of his narrative, Moshe recalls the sin of the Golden Calf and how, afterwards, he is the one who goes to Hashem and begs for forgiveness for them, back on Mount Sinai for forty days. He argues that Bnei Yisrael had resorted to idolatrous practices to which they had been accustomed in Egypt. Hashem accepts Moshe's prayers on the day that corresponded to the first of Ellul, and He gives His forgiveness. In order to show this to Bnei Yisrael, Hashem promised to engrave the Second Tablets, just as he had the first, yet Moshe had to make the Tablets himself, unlike the first time.

This is just like the king who did not want to pay for another marriage contract. Yet he understood his bride and took her back, agreeing to put his signature on a new contract, for without it the contract would be worthless.

In response to Hashem's request, Moshe was so desperate to show Bnei Yisrael that Hashem had forgiven them, and to put things right again between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael, that – like the matchmaker – he made the second Tablets himself. When he took the two blank tablets to Hashem, He engraved them and returned them to Moshe on Yom Kippur – the ultimate sign of forgiveness.

From this we can learn two very important lessons. Firstly, that if we can accept other people and try to understand their behaviour, in the event that we feel wronged by them, forgiveness is much easier.

Moreover, we can learn the importance of doing things for other people, especially our friends and family, even if we have nothing or very little to gain. The matchmaker had nothing to gain, but if she commissioned the new marriage certificate, the couple could be reunited. Moshe expresses this attribute in his willingness to make the second Tablets. He knew that in doing so, the bond between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael would be restored.

## What Are You Worth?

Adapted by Avital Rawson from a D'var Torah by Rabbi Lamm

In Bereshit, Esav says: "I have plenty." Rashi comments that Esav spoke boastfully, in essence proclaiming: I have plenty, more than I could ever want. Yaakov says in Bereshit: "I have all." Rashi comments that this means: I have all that I require. In Pirkei Avot it says: "Give to Him what is His, because you and what is yours are His!" In two short phrases the different philosophies of Yaakov and Esav are evident. Their attitudes reveal dramatically different world-views. What is the source of the great divide?

Esav evaluates his personal wealth in terms of quantity ("plenty"), as opposed to Yaakov who refers to the quality of his relationship to his possessions ("all"). These simple words betray that whilst one is still hopelessly addicted to temporary material existence, the other is living life on a higher frequency.

A powerful king once approached the famous Baron Rothschild and asked him what he was worth. The Baron answered that he was worth some fifty million Drachmas. The king felt that the answer somehow understated Rothschild's true holdings and conducted some investigations. When he discovered that the Baron was really worth five hundred million Drachmas, he felt betrayed and confronted the Baron again: "Why have you misled me and violated our trusting relationship? I am aware your assets exceed five-hundred million Drachmas!"

The Baron humbly replied that it was true that his holdings were some five hundred million but the king's original question had been, "How much are you worth?" To that, the Baron was compelled to tell the truth. "What I gave to charity approaches fifty million Drachmas. What I have managed to give away actually comprises my 'worth'. That is what I carry with me. It is locked in a vault of mitzvot forever. As to what will happen to the remainder of my wealth I am uncertain. I do not count it as my personal worth".

The spiritually oriented person does not aim to impress, or be impressed, by that which is temporary and purely worldly. He uses his material goods as a means to achieve greater ends. In the spiritual sphere, a person only competes against himself. One individual cannot be measured against another, but only against his best self.

“A candle for one is a candle for one hundred.” Spiritual growth by one brings benefits to many. Possessions, then, are experienced as tools that can bring us closer to Hashem, the Divine source of those objects. The ideal drive is for a state of being rather than a condition of having. If a person has a deeply invested relationship with Hashem then, even if materially deficient, that individual can truly say that he has all.

So, when the king asks us the question: “What are you ‘worth’?”, will our eyes look outward or inward? Will we answer, “I have” or “I am”? Will we have been deceived by Esav’s proclamation, or alerted to the eternal echo of that voice deep within, the voice of Yaakov?

How would you answer the question “What are you worth?”

## Reward and Punishment

Laura Maslin

This Parasha begins with Hashem presenting Bnei Yisrael with a blessing and a curse:

“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing is on condition that you listen to the commandments of Hashem your God, that I command you today. And the curse: if you do not listen to the commandments of Hashem your God, and you stray from the path that I command you today....”

It seems pretty straightforward. If we want to be blessed all we have to do is obey God’s commandments, otherwise we’ll be cursed – but is it as easy as it seems? Here is a short story to show us how easily we can be distracted from obeying Hashem.

There was once a king who was suffering from a severe cold. All the royal physicians had tried everything to cure his highness, but nothing seemed to work. His advisors suggested he turn to the community and offer a royal reward for the person who could come up with a cure for his illness.

Yankel, the local Yid, had an idea to make the king a pot of chicken soup. After all, it had always been the cure for him and his family whatever their illnesses were. His wife and children helped to prepare it to send to the king. Together they brought it to the palace. The royal guards told them they would be notified of its success or failure within two weeks.

A week later a royal messenger called at their front door: the chicken soup had worked! As a reward, Yankel was allowed an hour in the king’s treasure house to gather as much riches as he could. Yankel and his family couldn’t believe their luck. They were taken to the palace in a royal carriage and on arrival, Yankel was escorted to the treasure house with loads of empty sacks to fill with all the gold and silver he could.

When he entered the treasure house he hurriedly started collecting his riches, until he soon heard some fabulous music playing. He wondered where it was coming from and went to investigate. He walked around for a while until he discovered a magnificent orchestra playing the most wonderful music. He sat down and listened in amazement to the beautiful music.

Suddenly one of the royal servants called out: "One minute left Yankel!" He couldn't believe it. He had been so distracted by the orchestra that he'd forgotten all about collecting his reward. He managed to grab a mere few gold and silver coins before he was escorted out to his excited and expectant family.

When they saw Yankel, their faces dropped. "Daddy, where are all your sacks?" Yankel replied, "You don't understand, there was this fantastic orchestra playing..." He stopped and realised how stupid he sounded: how could he have become distracted when he had such a great opportunity before him?

This story shows us just how easy it is to stray from obeying Hashem, and although it may sound simple – do good and you will be blessed, otherwise you will be punished – we know how easily we can be distracted by the smallest things.

## Living by the light of the Menorah

Jonny Lipczer

Toward the end of Parashat Tetzaveh, the Torah talks about three Mitzvot that require actions twice every day – Korban Tamid, Incense, and the Ner Tamid.

Rabbi Ze'ev Brauer writes in his book 'Si'ach Hashulchan' that with the first two mitzvot, the actions are identical; in the morning and the evening, the same action takes place. However, with the Ner Tamid, two totally different actions are required.

In the evening we light the Menorah, and in the morning, when the lights have gone out, we don't relight it, but we clean it out and prepare it for the evening. What is the purpose of this specific act? Since this is basically a technical action, why does it need a particular, designated time in the morning? Why not immediately prior to the lighting, or whenever there's a spare moment in the day?

It seems that the Torah wants to give a specific purpose for this preparation. Perhaps this is signifying to us that when we do our own day-to-day work, it is only a means for us to be able to enjoy the time after work when we can perform the more spiritual activities of our lives – "by the light of the Menorah".

This may include time with families, and learning, and generally improving ourselves spiritually.

The purpose of preparing lights in the morning is that one should realise before one goes out to school, university or work what the purpose of that is, i.e. preparing for afterwards.

Just as the main use of the Menorah is at night, and we prepare for that right at the beginning of the day. So, too, when person is busy during the day he is simply preparing himself for the evening when one is free from everyday activity. The preparation is just as important as the actual lighting.

We should appreciate that, while it is important to spend our time dealing in non-spiritual matters, such as earning a livelihood, or studying at school or university, we should always be aware of the purpose behind it, and that the main objective of our lives is to improve ourselves spiritually.

With this in mind we can better appreciate and make use of the time we have at the end of the day, using it to give nourishment to our souls, spending time in Limmud Torah, to enjoy company of friends and family.

Bnei Akiva has always placed a great deal of importance, not only on Limmud Torah, but doing so in a social atmosphere where chaverim can learn with each other and from each other.

If we take the time out to consider the purpose of what we are doing, then this will lead to a greater appreciation of our lives and all the things we hold close, and *b'ezrat Hashem* the devotion we give in particular to Limmud Torah should bring peace to the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

## The immortality of influence

Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks

It was the worst crisis in Moses' life. Incited by the 'mixed multitude', the Israelites complain about the food: "If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna."

It was an appalling show of ingratitude, but not the first time the Israelites had behaved this way. Three earlier episodes are recorded in the book of Shemot (chs. 15-17) immediately after the crossing of the Red Sea. First at Marah they complained that the water was bitter. Then, in more aggressive terms, they protested at the lack of food: "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Later, at Refidim, they grumbled at the absence of water, prompting Moses to say to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

The episode in our parasha – at the place that became known as Kivrot Hataavah – was not, then, the first such challenge Moses had faced, but the fourth. Yet Moses' reaction this time is nothing less than complete despair:

"Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you, that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat'. I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now – if I have found favour in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin."

It is an extraordinary outburst. Moses prays for death. He is not the last prophet of Israel to do so. Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah did likewise making us realise that even the greatest can have their moments of despair. Yet the case of Moses is particularly puzzling. He had faced, and overcome, such difficulties before. Each time, God had answered the people's requests. He had sent water *and* manna *and* quails. Moses knew this. Why then did the fourth outburst of the people ("If only we had meat to eat") induce in this, the strongest of men, what seems nothing less than a complete breakdown? Equally strange is God's reaction:

"Bring me seventy elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Make them come to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone."

To be sure, this is a response to Moses' complaint, "I cannot carry all these people by myself." Yet both complaint and response are puzzling. In what way would the appointment of elders address the internal crisis Moses was undergoing? Did he need them to help him find meat? Clearly not. Either it would appear by a miracle or it would not appear at all. Did he need them to share the burdens of leadership? The answer is again, no. Already, not long before, on the advice of his father-in-law Yitro, he had created an infrastructure of delegation. Yitro had said this:

"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you. You cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."

Moses acted on that suggestion. He therefore already had assistants, deputies, a leadership team. In what way would this new appointment of seventy elders make a difference? Besides which, why the emphasis in God's reply on spirit: "I will take of the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them" ? In what way did the elders need to become prophets in order to help Moses? Being a prophet does not help someone in carrying out administrative or other burdens of leadership. It helps only in knowing what guidance to give the people – and for this, one prophet, Moses, is sufficient. To put it more precisely, either the seventy elders would deliver the same message as Moses or they would not. If they did, they would be superfluous. If they did not, they would undermine his authority – precisely what Joshua [11: 28] feared. Conscious of the multiple difficulties in this text, Ramban offers the following interpretation:

"Moses thought that if they had many leaders, they would appease their wrath by speaking to their hearts when the people started complaining. Or it is possible that when the elders prophesied, and the spirit was on them, the people would know that the elders were established as prophets and would not all gather against Moses but would ask for their desires from them as well."

Both suggestions are insightful, but neither is without difficulty. The first – that the elders would become peacemakers among the people – did not call for a new leadership cadre. Moses already had the heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. The second – that their presence would diffuse the people's anger by giving them many people, not one, to complain to – is equally hard to understand.

We recall that when the people had one other person to turn to with their concerns (Aaron), this led to the making of the Golden Calf. Why did God not "take of the spirit" that was on Moses and place it on Aaron at that time? It would have prevented the single greatest catastrophe in the wilderness years? Besides which, we do not find that the seventy elders actually did anything at Kivrot Hataavah. The text states [11: 25] "When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again" [this is the plain sense according to most commentators, though the Targum reads it differently]. How then did this once-and-never-to-be-repeated flow of the prophetic

spirit make a difference? The more we reflect on the passage, the more the difficulties multiply.

Yet something happened. Moses' despair disappeared. His attitude was transformed. Immediately thereafter, it is as if a new Moses stands before us, untroubled by even the most serious challenges to his leadership. When two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, prophesy not in the Tent of Meeting but in the camp, Joshua senses a threat to Moses' authority and says, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" Moses replies, with surpassing generosity of spirit, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them."

In the next chapter, when his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, start complaining about him, he does nothing: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Indeed, when God becomes angry with Miriam, Moses prays on her behalf. The despair is gone. The crisis has passed. These two challenges were far more serious than the request of the people for meat, yet Moses meets them with confidence and equanimity. Something has taken place between him and God and he has been transformed. What was it?

To understand the sequence of events, we must first place them in their historical context. Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, in his insightful recent book on Moses' leadership, *Tzir ve-tzon* (Alon Shvut, 5762) notes that there is a marked change of tone between the book of Shemot and the book of Bemidbar. The complaints do not change, but God's and Moses' responses do. In Shemot, God does not get angry with the people, or if He does, Moses' prayers are able to turn away wrath. In Bemidbar, the responses – sometimes God's, sometimes Moses' – are more unforgiving. What has changed?

R. Lichtenstein suggests that the early volatility of the people is forgivable. To be sure, they should have had faith in God, but they had never been faced with the Red Sea, or the desert, or lack of food and water before. Their greatest offence – making the Golden Calf – leads to a long pause in the narrative, essentially from Shemot, Chapter 25 to Bemidbar, Chapter 11. During this period, in response

to Moses' prayer for forgiveness, God instructs the people to build a tabernacle which will ensure His constant presence among them.

Much of the second half of Shemot, the entire book of Vayikra and the first ten chapters of Bemidbar are dedicated to the details of the sanctuary, the service that was to take place there, and the reconstitution of Israel as a holy nation camped, tribe by tribe, around it. The whole of this sequence of 53 chapters, all of which is set in the desert at Sinai, is a kind of metahistorical moment, a break in the journey of the Israelites from place to place. Time and space stand still. Between the twin events of the Giving of the Torah and the construction of the Tabernacle, the Israelites are turned from an undisciplined mass of fugitive slaves into a nation whose constitution is the Torah, whose sovereign is God alone and at whose centre (physically and metaphysically) is the Mishkan or sanctuary, the visible sign of God's presence. They are no longer what they were before they came to Sinai. They are now "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation".

Hence Moses' despair when they murmured about the food. They had done so before. But they were different before. They had not yet gone through the transformative experiences that shaped them as a nation. What caused Moses' spirit to break was the fact that, no sooner had they left the Sinai desert to begin the journey again, they reverted to their old habits of complaint as if nothing had changed. If the revelation at Sinai, the experience of Divine anger at the Golden Calf, and the long labour of building the Tabernacle had not changed them, what would or could? Moses' despair is all too intelligible. For the first time since his mission began he could see defeat staring him in the face. Nothing – or so it seemed – not miracles, deliverances, revelations, or creative labour, could change this people from a nation that thought of food into one that grasped the significance of the unique ethical-spiritual destiny to which they had been called. Perhaps God, from the perspective of eternity, could see some ray of hope in the future. Moses, as a human being, could not. "I would rather die," he says, "than spend the rest of my life labouring in vain."

We now reach the point of speculation. I interpret the sequence of events as follows:

There can come a time in the life of any truly transformative leader when the sun of hope is eclipsed by the clouds of doubt – not about God, but about people and above all, about oneself. Am I really making a difference? Am I deceiving myself when I think I can change the world? I have tried, I have given the very best of my energies and inspiration, yet nothing seems to alter the depressing reality of human frailty and lack of vision. I have given the people the word of God himself, yet they still complain; still they think only about the discomforts of today, not the vast possibilities of tomorrow. Such despair can occur to the very greatest (to reiterate: not only Moses but also Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah prayed to die). Moses was the greatest. Therefore God gave him the greatest gift of all – one that no one else has ever been given.

God let Moses see the influence he had on others. For a brief moment God took “the spirit that is on you and put it on them” so that Moses could see the difference he had made to one group, the seventy elders. Moses needed nothing more. He did not need their help. He did not need them to continue to prophesy. All he needed was a transparent glimpse of how his spirit had communicated itself to them. Then he knew he had made a difference.

Little could he have known that he – who encountered almost nothing from the Israelites in his lifetime but complaints, challenges and rebellions – would have so decisive an influence that the people of Israel 3,300 years later would still be studying and living by the words he transmitted; that he had helped forge an identity that would prove more tenacious than any other in the history of mankind; that in the full perspective of hindsight he would prove to have been the greatest leader that ever lived. He did not know these things; he did not need to know these things. All he needed was to see that seventy elders had internalised his spirit and made his message their own. Then he knew that his life was not in vain. He had disciples. His vision was not his alone. He had planted it in others. Others, too, would continue his work after his lifetime. That was enough for him, as it must be for us. Once Moses knew this, he could face any challenge with equanimity (except, many years later, at Kadesh, but that is another story).

Understood thus, there is a message in Moses' crisis for all of us (that, surely, is why it is recounted in the Torah). I remember when my late father z"l died and we – my mother and brothers – were sitting shiva. Time and again people would come and tell us of kindnesses he had done for them, in some cases more than fifty years before. I have since discovered that many people who have sat shiva, r'l, have had similar experiences.

How moving, I thought, and at the same time how sad, that my father z"l was not there to hear their words. What comfort it would have brought him to know that despite the many hardships he faced, the good he did was not forgotten. And how tragic that we so often keep our sense of gratitude to ourselves, saying it aloud only when the person to whom we feel indebted has left this life, and we are comforting his or her mourners. Perhaps that is just the human condition. We never really know how much we have given others – how much the kind word, the thoughtful deed, the comforting gesture, changes lives and is never forgotten. In this respect, if in no other, we are like Moses. He too was human; he had no privileged access into other people's minds; without a miracle, he could not have known the influence he had on those closest to him. All the evidence seemed to suggest otherwise. The people, even after all God and he had done for them, were still ungrateful, querulous, quick to criticise and complain. But that was on the surface. For a moment God gave him a glimpse of what was beneath the surface. He showed him how Moses' spirit had entered others and lifted them, however briefly, to the level of prophetic vision.

God did this for no other person – not then, not now. But if it was enough for Moses, it is enough for us. The good we do lives after us. It is the greatest thing that does. We may leave a legacy of wealth, power, even fame, but these are questionable benefits and sometimes harm rather than help those we leave them to. What we leave to others is a trace of our influence for good. We may never see it, but it is there. That is the greatest blessing of leadership. It alone is the consolation beyond grief, the part of life that never dies.





## Songs, Israel and the Torah

Alex Greenberg

On my first visit to the Kotel I was overwhelmed just making my way to the wall, holding onto it as I davened to Hashem above. The whole world stopped for me as I davened at the last remaining part of the Beit Hamikdash, the place where Hashem's Shechina, concentrated presence, rested on Earth. I knew all these things, have been brought up believing them, and yet, as I turned around I saw the most secular Israeli ever, down to the paper kipah they make you wear, doing exactly the same thing! How could it be that this guy had the same reaction I did? How could I understand his kesher?

Different meals at BA, and for that matter, in Judaism, have different flavours. This doesn't just mean that you only get chulent on Shabbat lunch (this should be changed!) but also that you get different types of songs. It seems that the darker it gets outside, the slower and sadder the songs get, culminating in the starting of a nigun just before we bensch. These wordless melodies are often likened to the neshama crying, with the most intrinsic things within a person being let out as a song.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi z"l, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, likened the two types of songs to the two types of connection to Eretz Yisrael. At Bnei Akiva, as well as understanding the history and beauty of our homeland we also strive to appreciate its *kedusha*. Not just its importance to Jews, but its centrality within Judaism itself. Whilst the first pioneers did not value this aspect, they were still central to the development of our Medina. R. Shneur Zalman explains that they are like the nigun and we, at BA, are like the song. Both our souls yearn for the same things; we both have the same heartfelt tune. The difference is that we know the Torah. It is the Torah that adds the words to our nigun. Instead of yearning like those who have become assimilated or unlearned we can go up a step and articulate our feelings, say what it is that causes us to act as we do. The question is how we teach others the words, and whether we can ensure that in the years to come we are all singing the same song.

The same parable can be extended to the way my secular friend and I felt at the Kotel. We both had the melody and so felt the same connection to the place. The difference is that I had a better idea why. I had the verses.

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## Getting close to Hashem

Dina Falk

Why in Shalom Alechem do we say “boachem leshalom”, come in peace, and then towards the end of the song we say “tzetchem leshalom”, go in peace? Surely these instructions that we give the angels are contradictory?

During the week we have several obstacles between us and Hashem. Our busy lives mean that although we try and connect to Hashem, other things often get in the way. Therefore, during the week we need the angels to act as mediators between us and Hashem. Thus, at the beginning of the song, we still believe we need a mediator as that is what we have been used to all week. However, as we sing Shalom Alechem and enter into the spirit of Shabbat, we realise that Shabbat is “Me’ein Olam Ha’ba” – on Shabbat we need no mediator as we are able to connect to Hashem on a far deeper level. Therefore, we gently ask the angels to leave us to be alone with Hashem over Shabbat. All that matters is us and our connection to Hashem.

## When Shabbat gets difficult

Baruch Baigel

Once upon a time, I was walking through the park in Edgware and a very strange thing happened. A little egg hatched open and out jumped a little baby bird to the delight of its nachas shepping mummy. Suddenly a lion, a rarity in the peaceful town of Edgware, jumped out of the bushes and ate the mummy bird. The lion wasn't full and could do with some dessert, at which point he began chasing the baby bird all round the park. Just as the baby bird took her first breaths of fresh air she began running as fast as her little legs could carry her. The baby bird was doing well but became tired and the lion was gaining on her. Her feet were so small and her wings were so big that they kept getting tangled and tripping her up. The only way to escape the greedy lion was to run up the nearest tree. Panting at the top of the tree she turned her eyes up to the heavens and exclaimed, "Hashem, why did you give me these burdensome wings – they did nothing to help me to escape from the lion but rather acted as obstacles in my way?"

As I continued to walk many philosophical thoughts floated around my brain. Questions like, what was a lion doing in a park in Edgware? and how could a newly born bird speak perfect English? Suddenly, I realised that the little birdy had completely missed the point. Her wings were not for walking or running with but for flying with. They are not meant to act as an obstacle and obstruction but rather as an opportunity.

There are two type of mitzvot – positive and negative. There is a further distinction within the category of positive mitzvot between those which are time-bound and those which are not restricted to any specified time period. The general rule is that women are exempt from time-governed mitzvot e.g. Tefillin and Tzitzit, but Shabbat seems to be an anomaly. On Shabbat the time bound mitzvot of Kiddush, Shabbat candles, and three meals all have to be fulfilled by both men and women. Why are certain mitvot of Shabbat treated differently?

The answer lies in the repetition of the ten commandments in the Torah. In Parashat Yitro the Torah says “remember the Shabbat”, whereas in Parashat Va’etchanan it says “guard the Shabbat”. Remembrance is a command to perform the positive mitzvot of Shabbat whereas guarding commands us not to perform the thirty-nine Melachot (prohibited works). On Friday night we sing in Lechah Dodi: “Shamor vezachor bedibur echad”, God pronounced these two different versions of the Ten Commandments simultaneously, making these two aspects of Shabbat inseparable.

The Gemara projects this in its answer to the question that we are discussing: “Everyone obligated in the ‘guarding’ of Shabbat is obligated in the ‘remembering’ of Shabbat.” It is impossible for people to be commanded to keep the negative laws of Shabbat without being commanded in the positive laws. The Shmirah of the thirty-nine Melachot creates the framework in which the positive commandments pertaining to creating Oneg Shabbat can be fulfilled. Therefore, women must be obligated in these mitzvot.

Many of us share the baby bird’s attitude to her wings in our own relationship with Shabbat. We see it as burdensome, full of obstacles and prohibitions; a day without ‘phones, cars or TV. We can’t get on with normal life, our wings get in our way. Like the bird, this misses the point. Shabbat is a day to reflect, evaluate the past week, aspire towards the coming week and spend time with people in a real, not virtual way. Shabbat gives the rest of the week meaning – it is a gift from God and we should use it to fly.

## The meaning of Shabbat

Rebecca Fisher

Imagine you have invited seven friends over for dinner. As they arrive, one of them gives you a box of chocolates as a gift. At the end of the meal, you pass the chocolates around the table, handing one to each of your guests in turn. However, when you reach the friend who gave you the chocolates in the first place, you miss them out and give their chocolate to the next person. Later, you hand the chocolates around for a second time, and, yet again, you avoid giving any to the person who gave them to you. Clearly, this is unthinkable rudeness, to share a gift with everyone apart from the very person who gave you the chocolates in the first place!

Similarly, each and every one of us has been given the gift of life by Hashem. He gave us seven days each week and we have the freedom to use these days as we please, dividing our time amongst many different activities and pastimes. If we were to devote all seven days of our week to other people, and never share any of our gift of life with Hashem, it would be outrageously selfish.

Put yourself in the place of a giver. How would you feel if someone didn't recognise your gift? if you were sidelined and had to sit back and watch your gift being enjoyed by others whilst you were left out of the picture?

For this simple reason, we spend one day each week keeping Shabbat, giving something back to Hashem who gave us the gift of life and to whom we must be eternally grateful.

טוב להודות לה'  
**It is good to thank Hashem**

Avi Wiesenberg

King David here in Tehilim seems to be saying that in the mornings, it is important to praise Hashem for his kindness, but at night to speak of faith. Day and night are often used as expressions of good and bad times. During the day the sun is shining and things are good, the morning is a time of potential, of new beginnings. Life seems better as we can see and understand what is taking place. Night, in contrast, represents times that are troublesome, where we lack clarity and answers cannot be found. Darkness envelops us.

This verse teaches us that during the day, when all is well, it is often easy to forget Hashem and the help He has given you. Therefore it is at that time when you must remember to praise Hashem and speak of His kindness. At night however, when things seem difficult, it may be impossible or inappropriate to thank Hashem or sing His praises. It is at such times when you must have faith. "V'emunatcha baleilot" means that you must have the faith that night will turn to day and there will be a light at the end of the tunnel. Faith that Hashem has not deserted us nor turned away.

There is a brief Midrash describing Bnei Yisrael as they walked through the splitting of the sea. In the middle of the sea with the columns of water on either side, there were some people who were on the point of complaining to Moshe that the sea bed was muddy. At first sight this Midrash seems very strange, but I would like to offer an interpretation given by Rav Tabori. It would seem that many of the Bnei Yisrael lost sight of the miracle that was taking place around them. They could only see the mud and the immediate problems. He compares it to today where there are problems within the State of Israel and it is often very easy to focus entirely on the negative. This is when we must try to remember we are still living through one of the greatest miracles in over 2000 years of exile. To have a state, to have an army and to be able to protect ourselves is a miracle. Although today the State of Israel is in one of its most difficult times, we must not become stuck in the mud.

There is a Gemara in the Jerusalem Talmud (Brachot 4b) which recounts that Rebbe Chiyah Bar Aba and Rebbe Shimon Bar Chalafta were walking in the Valley of the Arbel, when dawn started to break. Rebbe Chiyah commented that this is how the redemption of Am Yisrael will be, just like the sun at the break of dawn – rising slowly. The Gemara asks, from where is his proof? To which he quotes the following pasuk: “Because I sit in darkness Hashem is my light” (Micha 7). He continues to quote pesukim from Megilat Esther about how Mordechai rose in power, from being outside the court and overhearing the threat to Achashverosh, and continues to show Mordechai’s rise in power until finally... “ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה” – “for the Jews there was light and happiness and they were saved” .

Two main questions I feel can be asked on this Gemara: Why did they choose that particular verse about sitting in darkness, and why is the Purim story the one chosen as an example of redemption? I feel this relates back to our original discussion on night and day, light and darkness. Sitting in darkness is an example of the bad times when the Prophet is unsure and Israel sits waiting to be redeemed, an example of night. In addition, I feel the Purim story was chosen as it is a perfect example of Hashem bringing redemption in a natural way, being hidden throughout the story. It can therefore be suggested that the reason why the third and final redemption is likened to sunrise is because it will be natural. Anyone that has ever climbed Masada and waited for sunrise will also know it is painfully slow, with every stage of dawn taking a while, and just when you think the sun isn’t going to rise at all, it finally appears.

Ultimately night will always turn to day. Day always follows night with the hope that even if things seem bad at night, we hold onto the belief that a new dawn will rise. So too, with the Jews at the splitting of the sea, we shouldn’t get bogged down in the mud that is present during the miracle. We should be able to see the miracle happening around us and finally, slowly but surely Hashem will make all the pieces of the puzzle fit together in a natural way. We should have faith that eventually – “ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר”

So it should be for us all.



## The Chanukah Lights

Daniel Lightstone

The festival of Chanukah is very different from other festivals in the Jewish calendar. It is a 'painless' festival. No problems of missing work or school, no Succah to build, no Matzot and no fasting. It is celebrated in the home, and the ceremony of lighting the candles is a joy to both parents and children.

It is only by looking deeper into the meaning and objective of Chanukah, that we can appreciate its importance to every generation, and perhaps today, its message is more important than ever.

The alien culture of Hellenism was forced on the Jews. This brand of idolatry and immorality was presented under the guise of a more progressive society. Many Jews succumbed to the lure of Hellenism. Eventually a group of Jews led by Mattityahu challenged the military might of the Greeks and drove them out.

Despite the many hardships endured by the Jews under occupation, their first action was to clean out and purify the Temple. They initiated a thorough search for pure oil to rededicate the kindling of the lights in the Temple. Although they could have used ordinary oil under the circumstances, they insisted on sparing no effort to do things absolutely correctly, spurning any cutting of corners. We commemorate this by lighting the candles where everybody can see them, to publicise to the world what Chanukah really means.

When we recount in the Al Hanissim prayer the miracles of Chanukah, the lighting of the menorah with the miracle bottle of oil is nowhere to be found. But we do say: "in your abundant mercy did you rise up for them (the Jews), in their time of trouble. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few."

The message is that Hashem does not forsake us even when the odds are stacked heavily against us. When we are in the depths of despair, the light – a sign of the hand of Hashem, overrides our darkness and gloom.

Today we too are beset by problems of assimilation and cultures hostile to Judaism. There is growing anti-Semitism in the galut and troubles in Israel. The light of Chanukah assures us that Hashem is always there in our corner. Let us hope that in these dark days for Am Yisrael, Hashem will rise up for us and bring us that light of rededication and peace.

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### **Right here, right now**

Josh Lipman

A story was once told of the Chafetz Chaim as follows. An elderly man once came to the Chafetz Chaim for advice. Someone had suggested a man as a husband for his grown daughter. However, this man did not have all the qualities the father was looking for in a son-in-law, so he wasn't sure whether to wait for another man to turn up or to accept the match. The Chafetz Chaim replied, "When Sukkot arrives a Jew makes an effort to find the most beautiful etrog around and he will pay a high price for such a beautiful etrog without a blemish. It is fine to pick and choose before Yom Tov as there is no rush. However, on erev Yom Tov there are often only a few etrogim left and you must accept the best that you can get. "The same", he said, "applies to you. Your daughter reached marriageable age a number of years ago, and that was the time for you to be picking and choosing her husband. However, as time is running out for your daughter you must now make do with whoever you can."

There is something that we can all learn from this. Often in life we come across situations where we must make choices. However, as we have so much time for these choices we often put off making a decision believing that there will always be time later. This is not the way we should act. We should put all our efforts into our actions in the present and achieve as much as we can now. That way we may avoid disappointment in the end.

## Following God's commandments

Ben Thwaites

In Judaism one of our festivals is the Festival of the Weeks – Shavuot. This name represents the seven weeks from Pesach until the receiving of the Torah. The Jewish people were brought out of Egypt into the wilderness where they could accept the Torah. When being given the laws they said “Naaseh Venishma” – we will do and we will listen. On the surface this seems very peculiar. If someone were to offer you a job that you had to commit to for the rest of your life, you would first enquire what the job entailed, and then consider if you were going to accept or not. The Jews did not do this. Instead they responded “Ok, we will do everything you say God, even though we have no idea what it's all about”.

To try and understand why the Jews took this apparently nutty leap of faith, we have to consider how we sometimes lead our own lives. If we know something and are faced with a scenario that requires that knowledge, we will of course apply it. For example you do not ask anyone how to get out of bed in the morning – there is a simple process of pulling back the sheets, lifting your legs up and getting up onto your feet. If however, we are not knowledgeable in a topic and we need information, we will go to someone who is. When we are ill, God forbid, we go to a doctor who may prescribe some appropriate drugs. On the whole, you will have no idea whatsoever how these pills make you better. They could be anything, but you still swallow them, as you trust the doctor's training.

God created the world, He created human beings, and for the Jews in the desert, He had just managed to bring them out of Egypt with an immense show of power and miracles. Like the doctor, God knows what is best for us and so it is not always necessary for us to understand the laws in order to perform them. He knows what laws will help us most. Our challenge is to recognise God's endless power and understanding and thereby declare that we will keep what He commands, unconditionally. We must accept that God wants the best for us and only He can show us how to achieve it.

## The engraved Torah

Rav Yossi Greenfield

There are four Parashot in the Torah that teach us the Halachot of the Mishkan, they are packed with detail and hidden significance. I would like to start with one particular Halacha, regarding respect of a Talmid Chacham. This Halacha is derived from the details of the Holy Ark. The Talmud in Masechet Brachot (8b) says: "One should be careful with a Talmid Chacham that forgot his learning for the Holy Tablets and the broken Tablets where both were kept in the Ark."

This Halacha deals with a very interesting question. We all know the Halachot of respecting Talmidei Chachamim. When a Talmid Chacham comes in to a room one should stand in deference to his superior learning and status. Is a Talmid Chacham who has lost his memory through age or illness and who cannot recall the impressive fund of Torah knowledge that he accumulated, still entitled to these honours? Do we still have a Halachic obligation to respect him as before? The Gemara responds unequivocally: Yes!

Just as the broken Tablets were placed in the holiest of places – the Ark – so too should we show deference and respect to an imperfect Talmid Chacham. But can we make this comparison? The tablets surely have extraordinarily holy status, since God wrote them. Can we compare them to a Talmid Chacham who has forgotten his Torah learning?

In order to understand this Gemara it is essential to look into two further aspects of the Tablets. Why did Moshe have to break the Tablets? The Torah tells us that when Moshe came down and saw the people sinning he threw the Tablets from his hands, but why? What had he learnt by seeing it himself, that he hadn't known a few minutes ago when he was told by God that his people had made a Golden calf and were worshiping it? If he thought that they were unworthy of receiving the tablets why did he take them down at all?

One answer we find in the Midrash, which says: "from here we learn that seeing is more powerful than hearing". When you hear about

something terrible that happened the effect it has on you is significantly less than seeing it with your own eyes! The Targum Onkelus directs us in a slightly different direction. When Moshe came down it says that he heard 'Kol Anot' (קול ענות), the translation given is 'a voice of joy'. What struck Moshe when he came down is not the actual worshiping but the joyfulness that was visible in their voices and their dancing. What he saw was much more than a group of people that had been led astray, he saw a crowd rejoicing and dancing in their sin. This was a devastating sight for Moshe and in response to this he smashed the Tablets. It is one thing to sin, it is another when the sin is accompanied by joy and enthusiasm. This form of sin has to be dealt with in an entirely different manner for it is deep in the conscience and soul of the people. New Tablets had to be formed immediately, and new faith made to sprout in the hearts of the people.

Let us consider a further aspect – the writing on the Tablets. The Torah says: "and the writing is God's writing engraved on the tablets" (חרות על הלוחות). What is the difference between any form of writing and engraving? Most forms of writing are basically a layer written on top of an object – easy to erase or scratch off. Engraving differs by virtue of the fact that the writing has become integral to the stone; no separation between the writing and the object on which it appears.

Torah knowledge is engraved on a person, by definition it is not an external knowledge to be stored in our minds but rather a dynamic substance that forms our identities and shapes our personality. The Torah is not a religion it is a way of life, engraved on the heart and mind of the individual, integral.

Likewise, the Talmid Chacham. He may be unable to recall his knowledge but we are nonetheless obliged to respect him. His recollection of the fine detail of Halacha may have faded but the character and the personality that the Torah engraves onto a learned person does not disappear, it is intrinsic.

In a world full of cultural temptations and images, drawing us to dance around in a circle, we have to strive to acquire Torah in such a way that it is not written on us but engraved deeply in our minds and souls. The way to do this is by deepening our understanding of the Torah and continuously striving to strengthen the identification and love of Torah and mitzvot. In so doing, we perceive Torah as internal, the very thread of our lives.

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## Tisha B'Av – A day of joy?

Daniel Cohen

The saddest day in the Jewish calendar. The day on which so many calamities have happened to the Jews, including the destruction of both Batei Mikdash, both Temples. However sad the day is though, there is more to it than that.

The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (18b) talks about the way that fasts such as Tisha B'Av are described both as a Tzom (fast) and as Sason VeSimcha (joy and happiness). How can Tisha B'Av be *both* a fast, *and* a day of joy and happiness?!

There was once a Rabbi who, on Tisha B'Av, would sit with his head bowed between his knees, his eyes streaming with tears. From time to time in the course of the day he would raise his head, look around and ask: "Mashiach's not here yet? He hasn't arrived yet?"

Tisha B'Av is most definitely a very sad day, but we can also learn something hopeful from it. The rabbi in the story knew that with the coming of Mashiach and the subsequent rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, Tisha B'Av would be changed from a day of Tzom to a day of Sason VeSimcha. Hopefully our fasting and prayer will ensure that Tisha B'Av will be, from now on, a joyous occasion in the year.

## Alcoholics Anonymous and Purim

Danny Steel

Perhaps the most popular day in the Jewish calendar is Purim. After all, who could fail to enjoy a day when people send you mishloach manot full of sweets and hamentashen. Then there's the great food at the seudah, the megillah reading (compete with your mates to see who can bang after Haman's name for longest) and of course all the fancy dress (a great excuse to try your mum's clothes on). However, perhaps the most enjoyable custom, yet also the most controversial, is the role that alcohol plays during our celebrations.

Although small quantities of wine are used for sacramental purposes, Judaism is a religion that generally frowns upon drunkenness. It is forbidden to enter a shul and daven whilst drunk. When Hashem gave the death penalty to Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, according to many commentators it was because they performed activities in the Mishkan under the influence of wine. Additionally, alcohol abuse also conflicts directly with the concept of mishmeret haguf – looking after one's health and protecting oneself from bodily harm. So why then is Purim a day of "booze for Jews"?

Purim is essentially the celebration of a series of miracles, resulting in the survival of the Jewish people from an oppressive ruler. Banquets and wine are central in the construction of these miracles. It is an alcohol-charged Achashverosh who sends for Queen Vashti to perform. Her refusal and subsequent banishment creates the necessary framework for Esther's appointment as Persia's 'First Lady'. A wine-filled banquet is also the scene of Haman's final humiliation and Achashverosh's eventual siding with the Jewish people. It for this reason that wine (which remains preferable to other alcoholic beverages) is symbolically used in our celebrations. How much we should drink is another issue!

In Gemara Megilla (7b), Rava declares that one is obligated to become intoxicated to the extent that he does not know the difference between "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai". Sounds great, but then the Gemara tells a story that encourages caution in

attempting the above challenge. Rabbah (an almighty Talmid Chacham) got so plastered he ended up killing his Seudah guest, Rabbi Zeira! Fortunately, he had the power to revive Rabbi Zeira, but that was the last time Rabbi Zeira went near to Rabbah's Purim seudah. He told Rabbah that miracles don't happen every time and clearly wanted to avoid a further encounter with his wine-fuelled friend.

Partaking of wine on Purim is most definitely a mitzvah. Most commentators believe that you can fulfil your obligation by getting a bit tipsy or consuming more wine than usual (without getting hammered). Seriously, remember that whatever you do or do not drink on Purim, you must always be celebrating the genuine reasons for our festival and create a kiddush Hashem in our happiness, not a alcohol-induced chilul Hashem.

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## Holocaust heroes and remembrance

Natasha Remington

*"In Germany they came first for the communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up because, I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up."*

To mark the Holocaust, we find Yom HaShoah in the Jewish calendar and National Holocaust Memorial Day in the English calendar. These days were established to ensure that the atrocities of the Holocaust are never forgotten, and to ensure that its warnings are not lost with the deaths of the last survivors.

History has shown us that humans can be savage and brutal to their fellow man. The characters we tend to recall are those at the heart of this brutality such as Hitler and Eichmann. There are also others who

are not evil, but like in the poem, choose to ignore situations that do not directly affect them. However, there is a tendency to forget that alongside this, there are many people who put their lives at risk to stand up for humanity. Here are the stories of two very different people, but whose tales are equally inspiring.

“If you think something is wrong, don’t just talk about it, do something about it. This can often be difficult; it might seem hopeless; you might get no thanks for your efforts; there is no guarantee for success and you might not have achieved anything. But at least you will have tried.”

These are the words of Janusz Korczak. As an elderly man he ran an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto, an area of the city into which nearly half a million Jews had been crammed behind high walls and barbed wire. When news came that the Nazis were approaching, Janusz was told he would be able to escape, yet he chose to stay with the 200 children from the orphanage as they were taken to Treblinka, a concentration camp, where they were all murdered in the gas chambers. Even though he knew they had no hope of survival he stayed with the children to make them a little less terrified. The author of the book “The Pianist” commented that “Korczak’s true value was not in what he wrote, but in the fact that he lived as he wrote”. This is such an important message, that it is not enough to just refrain from bad acts.

It is also a widely held belief in Judaism. In Pirkei Avot, Shammai says “Say little, and do much; And receive every person with a pleasant face”. Hillel asks “if not now, when?” He also instructs us to “Be like students of Aaron. Love peace and pursue peace. Love creations.” By this he means that it is not enough to want peace, for it may not come on its own. We have to be active pursuers as well. We must be willing to work hard to ensure that peace occurs.

The second part of the saying explains the means to pursuing such peace. We must first love our neighbour unconditionally. He uses the term ‘creations’ specifically. This is because only when we realise that Hashem creates all people in the same fundamental fashion can we truly love another.

The second person who shared this belief of the need for action is Nicholas Winton, who has been hailed “the Schindler of Britain”. Winton, an Englishman, visited the refugee camps in Prague. He was appalled that no one was helping the children, so he set up an office in Prague, persuaded the Home Office to allow the children into Britain and subsequently saved 669 children from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938 at the age of just 29. This was an absolutely incredible act, as each child needed a family in Britain and the equivalent of £1600. Yet, despite this, he was not famous for it until recently because nobody knew of his actions until his wife discovered some of the paperwork, 50 years later. Mr. Winton described his actions during the war in a typically self-effacing manner. He said: “I just saw what was going on and did what I could to help.” His message is the same as Korczak’s. In a letter in 1939 he wrote: “There is a difference between passive goodness and active goodness. The latter is, in my opinion, the giving of one’s time and energy in the alleviation of pain and suffering. It entails going out, finding and helping those who are suffering and in danger and not merely in leading an exemplary life, in a purely passive way of doing no wrong.”

The legacy of his act extends across the globe. There are over five thousand descendants of the Winton children around the world. There is a tremendous amount that we can learn from both Korczak and Winton.

We often hear people telling us that “we must remember” but what does this actually mean? For our remembrance to be meaningful we must not merely recall the Holocaust but we must also take active steps to stop the suffering happening throughout the world today.

## Teshuva is for now

Daniel Cohen

There's a story told about Reb Asher of Stolin. Someone asked him: "How can I do Teshuva (repentance)? I've done a sin which the Rabbis say Teshuva can't change!" Reb Asher answered: "What's that got to do with *you*?! Go and do what you've got to do – do Teshuva. The Rabbis have taught that one hour of good deeds and repentance in Olam Hazeah (this world) is better than *all the life* of Olam Habah (the World to Come)!" Reb Asher was saying that moments of true Teshuva in this lifetime can be so valuable.

A fascinating story in the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 17a) illustrates this idea. There was a man who had slept with every single prostitute in the world, except for a very famous one. He travelled miles and miles over dangerous seas to reach her, risking life and limb to achieve his goal. When he got there, the woman blew out a breath and said to him, "Just like this air cannot go back to where it came from, so too will you not be accepted in repentance!" After much soul-searching, he realised: "The matter depends only on *me*!!" He put his head between his knees and cried, until he eventually died. A voice then came out from Heaven proclaiming that this man was now able to enter Olam Habah. When Rebbi heard this story, he cried and said: "There are some who acquire his place in Olam Habah through many years' hard work and striving, whilst others acquire Olam Habah in one moment."

That one moment which Rebbi spoke of is the very *same* moment that Reb Asher spoke of. These two poignant stories clearly show how there is *never* a moment when Teshuva can't be done. Even at the lowest point, a man can come back from the depths of sin, and elevate himself. But why wait? As it says in Pirkei Avot: "If not now, when?" Who knows what tomorrow brings?

We should all be inspired to do Teshuva at every possible moment.



## The garden of mitzvot

Rebecca Landy

There is a parable that compares the Torah to water, and the Jewish people to a garden. When it rains, the garden will only grow plants from the seeds and bulbs which have already been planted. If you only have weeds in your garden, then just weeds will grow. For a pretty garden, you need to remove all the weeds, and add seeds and bulbs.

This is like a person's relationship with the Torah. If you start off with lots of averot, you need to dig them out and turn your attention to the performance of mitzvot. By doing so, you can become a better Jew.

Even if you don't have so many midot tovot, by removing your averot you still get a pretty garden. However the greatest challenge is to remove your 'weeds' and plant 'bulbs' at the same time. This will create the most beautiful garden of all – a person who lives their life dedicated to fulfilling more and more mitzvot, whilst eliminating any averot.

This is what Pirkei Avot (Chapter 4, Mishna 2) means when Ben Azai says, "Run to perform even a minor mitzvah, and flee from sin, for one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah and the consequence of a sin is another sin." Mitzvot breed mitzvot and averot lead to more averot. If we surround ourselves with a garden of mitzvot, we will ensure that our lives are full of meaning and value.

## Chukkim and how they affect the individual

Daniel Jacobson

There are many mitzvot which are very easy to understand. Those such as charity and honouring one's parents seem to have a strong moral basis and, as such, we can understand why they play a part within Judaism. However there are others called chukkim, such as tefillin, which have no apparent meaning and it is often wondered what part they have to play. If there is no obvious change to the world caused by these actions, then what is the point of doing them?

These are a major part of Judaism. According to Rashi, the Parah Aduma, the archetype of all chukkim, was one of the three mitzvot taught to the Jews before the Torah was given, so what is it about these chukkim which makes them so important?

The word 'chuk' means to engrave and perhaps the point of these chukkim is to engrave ones personality. As opposed to other mitzvot like charity which are there to help out the world, chukkim help the individuals doing this action in order to engrave their personalities. Just by committing ourselves to doing these mitzvot, we become better individuals.

Being a madrich in Bnei Akiva one does not always see the end result. Having prepared a meeting for Shabbat and having imagined the great educational impact you would have on chanichim, you may get a bit disappointed as the chanichim run out time after time and end up ruining the whole point of the meeting.

Maybe being a madrich could be considered like another of the chukkim in this respect. Although sometimes one cannot see the point of what you have done, being a madrich definitely engraves on your personality and improves you as a person. This may just be something to think about as your chanichim run wild for the umpteenth time running!

## The importance of learning Torah

Bernard Freudenthal

In the Talmud (Derech Eretz Zuta Ch. 8) there is a story about Rabbi Akiva, the Tanna after whom of course our Tnua is named. There are many stories about Rabbi Akiva's amazing life and achievements. This tale is from the period in his life when he had just begun his mission to learn the whole Torah from scratch at the late age of forty. The story is set at the beginning of his service of study under his teachers, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.

Rabbi Akiva was walking on a journey between towns in Eretz Yisrael. He was in the middle of his trek, when he noticed on the side of the dirt track what looked like a sleeping man heaped up, motionless in rags. Seeing that in the beating sun, this fellow weary traveller must at least be very thirsty, Rabbi Akiva stopped to investigate and see what he could do to help. When he got up closer, it was soon apparent to him that the man slumped by the wayside was in fact dead.

Rabbi Akiva thought to himself, "What should I do? I can't just leave him here! He will never receive a proper or respectful burial, and besides, who knows who his relatives are! After all, I haven't passed anyone on this track for at least a good hour. If I don't do something about him, no one will." Rabbi Akiva brushed the dust off the body's face, and picked up the fallen traveller onto his shoulders. Graciously accepting his duty, he carried him under the midday sun four miles on a detour to the nearest cemetery and buried him there.

Rabbi Akiva then continued on his journey to his original destination. Once he arrived, he wasted no time in reaching his teachers, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, to impress on them the amazing act of Chesed and self-sacrifice that he had accomplished in caring for the abandoned body which he had stumbled upon on his journey. Their immediate reply to him came as a great shock. "With each and every step that you took, it was as if you were spilling blood!" they told him forthrightly. "An abandoned corpse is a 'Met Mitzvah' and we teach

that 'met mitzvah koneh mekomo' – it acquires the land on which it is found abandoned and should be buried where it is."

Thus Rabbi Akiva inadvertently broke his own teachers' 'Takanah' about the burial of a Met Mitzvah. It was not for this alone that he deserved their anger; his error also caused him to waste time that he should have been spending in their service. Despairingly he cried out, "If when my intentions were purely to merit from good deeds, I ended up as liable as a wicked person, then in the times when I am not intending to do good, how much more so must I be sinning in grave error!" As Rabbi Akiva says in the Talmud, from that time onwards, he never ceased to serve his teachers in order to learn Torah.

In this story we see how, despite Rabbi Akiva's best intentions to do nothing but pure good, through ignorance he came to do a grave error. However he drew the right conclusions, and resolved to never let his ignorance lead him astray again. Hopefully, we will never encounter circumstances as distressing as those that Rabbi Akiva discovered on his journey. However, we should all take his lead to study and learn Torah as preparation and experience for all the pitfalls and challenges that we might find confronting us in the future, in whichever aspect of our lives we might find them.

## Finders Keepers, Losers Weepers: Hashavat Aveida

Gidi Domnitz

Once upon a time, there was a huge city called Jaydee Ess. It was so big that it would take a person 46 and a half days to walk from one side to the other, much bigger than any city existing today. The powerful king of this city was King Wolfy. He was so powerful that he could command all the chickens in his kingdom to lay square eggs, and he could make all the cows produce chocolate milk.

Now this king had a son called Floppus. Floppus was the clumsiest and most forgetful person in all of Jaydee Ess. He was so forgetful and clumsy that he always lost his possessions! Sometimes he wouldn't be able to find his crown for a week, or his shoes for a month or even his house keys for an entire year (it must be said that he still hasn't found his servant who he lost when he was two!)

The king didn't know what to do about this. On the one hand he thought Prince Floppus was just going through a twenty-six year long phase, but on the other hand he was frightened Floppus would lose his kingdom one day.

"What should I do?" he would cry to his top advisors. These top advisors were never short of advice. "Tie everything down and glue his crown to his head", some would shout. "Execute him!" others would call. But the king could never decide what to do.

Now, at this point in time, a new group of people were starting to move into the kingdom of Jaydee Ess. This people were an ancient and wise people that some say have existed for thousands of years. They were known as the Wejes (pronounced wedges), and with their holy book, the Harot, settled in the lower-east-side.

Prince Floppus would love strolling down the road for twenty days or so to reach the lower-east-side in order to learn from the wise Wejes and their Harot. He was particularly fond of one of the elders, a flaky sort of chap known as Flaky Yams. Floppus would sit in the study halls there and learn from sunrise until sunset (often forgetting to eat), and

would sleep at Flaky Yams' house (whose two cooks – Aras and Anida would cook him splendid meals).

Every four or five months Prince Floppus would return to EiSea – the capital streets of Jaydee Ess, and teach King Wolfy all that he had learnt. The king thought this wonderful, but would often be upset as Floppus would return with less than he had when he set out, yet would then cheer up as the things Floppus would lose would mysteriously turn up on the palace doorstep.

One day, King Wolfy took a group of his knights and waged war with the distant country Zakar. So, he gave Floppus the keys of the kingdom to look after which he carried with him always, and even took them with him when he went to see the Wejes.

When King Wolfy returned from battle victorious, he found that he was locked out of the kingdom gates. He rung the bell and tried the old credit-card-in-the-lock-trick, but nothing helped. Wolfy was locked out of Jaydee Ess.

Floppus came to the gates on his knees: "I'm sorry father. I didn't mean to,...I...I...was at the Wejes...when I came back I found... I found I'd lost the keys!"

"YOU LOST THE KEYS?" Wolfy roared. "YOU LOST THE KEYS TO MY KINGDOM?" The king thought for a moment and said "It seems that whenever you go to see these Wejes, especially that flaky chap, you always lose your possessions. They must be up to something! Bring Flaky Yams to me here, at these gates!"

About twelve days later (it works out as EiSea is smack in the middle of Jaydee Ess), Flakey Yams came to the golden gates of Jaydee Ess to speak with King Wolfy.

"My dear Flaky chap," the king started, with a very sarcastic tone, "it appears that my son Floppus has lost the keys to the kingdom after an extended stay at your house! Speak the truth Wej! Did you steal the keys?"

“My Wolfyness, we stole nothing from your forgetful child.”  
“So how do you explain the fact that whenever Floppus came from visiting you, he would always come back with less, Wej!”  
“My dear king,” Flaky Yams began, “it is true he always lost his possessions, but did they not appear on the doorstep a few days after his returning to you? This is because we returned them to you on the doorstep! We are taught in our holy Harot that if we find something not belonging to us, we are commanded to return it. We must seek out the owner and deliver it to their property. That is why all the things he lost were found on your doorstep, and it is also why the keys have not been returned to you and why you are locked out of Jaydee Ess. We don’t have your keys!”

“My dear flaky Wej, you sound true and honest. Tell me what I should do!” “Well, O hairy wolf-like king, it appears you have no laws regarding the return of lost objects. Write it in your books and the keys shall be returned!”

Wolfy then proclaimed this to be law and after 23 and a half days (it was a big city!) the keys were returned to the king and he was finally able to enter his kingdom, Jaydee Ess.

In the Torah, we have a similar, if not identical law, known as Hashavat Aveida, as the Wejes have in their Harot. We are commanded to return the lost possessions of anyone, even if they are a pair of crusty, smelly and mould-infested socks, and not just to our best friends. By handing back someone’s personal items, objects, and possessions, not only are we fulfilling a mitzvah, but we are doing more than that. We are cheering a person up, making their day and inevitably making a friend and bringing peace to the Jewish people.

## What is honour?

Sheara Cowen and Liora Cohen

“Honour you father and your mother so that you may live a long time on the land that God your Lord is giving you.” Shemot 20:12

This is the last of the commandments between man and God, which can be seen to overlap with the commandments between man and man. It is stated that if this commandment is fulfilled then one will “live a long time on the land”. The Torah usually uses a rule that if a positive commandment isn’t fulfilled the reward which would be given is reversed. Therefore we can assume that by not fulfilling this commandment, one’s days will be shortened. However, one should not keep the commandments in order to receive a reward.

This commandment can be seen as passing down some responsibility from God to man: “...your parents are My partners in your creation.” The Torah therefore tells us to “honour your father and mother”. It doesn’t state how to honour our parents but from the first five commandments we deduce that it is done through emulating God.

Esav kept the commandment of honouring his parents assiduously. Whenever he served his father, he would wear his very best clothes. He also placed himself in danger to get food for his father. Yosef learned from him. Hence, when Yaakov asked him “Aren’t your brothers tending to the sheep in Shechem? Come, I wish to send you to them”, Yosef’s immediate reply was, “Here I am” (Bereshit 37:13). Yosef was ready to do as his father had told him, even though he knew that his brothers hated him. This teaches us how much a person must strive to support his parents, and seek out their desires, so that he will be able to do anything they wish.

The Ten Commandments are first mentioned in Parashat Yitro, and then repeated in Parashat Va’etchanan. There is a slight difference between the two passukim. In Yitro, it says just to have a “long life”. However, in Va’etchanan it adds, “to have a good life”. The root “Tov” has a gematria of seventeen pointing to the seventeen differences between the two sets of Luchot. The Gemara understands

that this phrase points to the World to Come. In other words, that it will be good for you in the *future*. The phrase "it will be good for you" is not in the first set of Luchot because they were broken and would no longer exist as a guide to future generations.

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## Respecting our parents

Marc Levene

If you had to ask someone what the fundamentals of our great religion are, they would most probably (hopefully) tell you the Torah or the Ten Commandments. A harder question would be to establish an order or a priority for the Ten Commandments. We all know that the commandments cannot be easily grouped into a hierarchy of importance, but many commentaries do in fact split them into groups. The best-known divides the first five from the last five, forming two groups. The difference is that the first group (if we look closely), comprises commandments that define man's relationship with God, also known as 'Bein Adam leMakom.' Ideas like "I am one God" and "You should have no others" etc. The second group contains commandments that define our relationships with other people known as 'Bein Adam lechaveiro.' Such things like not to steal and murder.

However, this is all very well, but there is one in the list that sticks out like a sore thumb: the fifth commandment. So that you don't have to quickly go check it up in Yitro, I will just remind you that it is in fact honouring your mother and father. Now, some suggest this is a great excuse for all parents across the world to use in an argument, but the roots of this go much deeper.

To truly fulfil your Avodat Hashem (service to God), you need to understand this commandment. It is not just about honouring your mother and father, but it is the link between the two concepts, the relationship between man and God, and man and man. The love and devotion we have (or should have) for God, is the same kind of

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relationship we should have with our parents. Getting up early every morning to daven, learning, leining and constantly doing mitzvot are all examples of our continual service to God. It is the same commitment we should devote to our parents. The converse is also true: how we act with our parents, and the way we feel for them should be mirrored in our relationship with God, having kavanah in everything we do. This might sound a little confusing but the underlying point is that our parents bring us closer to God and God brings us closer to our parents.

Now we can see the importance of the fifth commandment. But of course, it is also about loving and having respect in a practical way as well. To illustrate this, here is a well-known story:

A boy is handed a list of household chores by his mother. Simple things, like cleaning his room and doing the dishes. The young boy then proceeded to write a price by each job. Cleaning my room – £2.50, mowing the lawn – £3 etc. Altogether, it came to about £10, and the boy, very pleased with himself handed the list back to his mother. His mother frowned, turned the sheet of paper on its back and wrote a new list. Carried you for nine months – NO CHARGE, nurtured you as a young boy – NO CHARGE, paid and supported you through school – NO CHARGE, and the list continued in the same fashion. The boy was obviously speechless when the sheet returned. After a minute of silence he took out a big black pen, crossed out all his 'charges' and simply wrote PAID IN FULL.

A fitting story that maybe makes us all appreciate our parents a little more.

## Aliya – overcoming the hurdle

Aly Singer

Any good Religious Zionist would tell you that Avraham was the first to make Aliya to Eretz Yisrael. What was it about Avraham that enabled him to undertake this challenge? Of course he had tremendous faith in Hashem, but was there anything about his character that assisted him? A clue to answer this question can be found in Sefer Bereshit.

Toldot shamayim va'aretz  
Toldot ha'Adam  
Toldot **Noach**  
Toldot **Shem**  
Toldot **Terach**  
Toldot **Yishmael**  
Toldot **Yitzchak**  
Toldot **Yaacov**  
Toldot **Esav**

The first half of Sefer Bereishit can be divided into sections of 'Toldot' (generations):

One notable exception is Avraham. As the first of our forefathers and the 'first Jew', we would expect Avraham to also have a section titled 'Toldot Avraham'. Instead, the 'toldot' of Avraham are incorporated into 'Toldot Terach', Avraham's father.

The Midrash tells us of how Avram destroys the idols in the idol shop of his father Terach, and Chazal's portrayal of Terach is that of a *Rasha* (a wicked person). Why then does the Torah show such honour to Terach rather than Avraham?

Apart from the above midrash, we know very little about Terach. One of the very few things we do know is found at the end of Parashat Noach. Before Avram is given the command of 'Lech-Lecha', Terach sets off with his family to the Land of Canaan. Although he never actually gets there, settling in Charan, it could be that his merit lies in the fact that he was the first to set off in the direction of Eretz Yisrael.

Often in life, the hardest part is making the first move, breaking through the practical, social or economic barrier, overcoming the fear that things may not work the way you would like. Once you have cleared the first hurdle and the momentum is there, the rest often

falls into place. Terach overcame this barrier. He was the initiator. Avraham inherited from his father the ability to get up and go and maybe it was this trait that assisted Avraham in fulfilling the command of Lech-Lecha.

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## Sammy the Pig

Jonny Steel

There once lived a pig called Sammy. Sammy lived in New York City and loved nothing more than a stroll up and down the streets of Manhattan, chatting to everyone he met on the way. All the New Yorkers loved Sammy and everyone that met him would always pay him the ultimate pig compliment – “Wow Sammy, you’re such a beautiful fat pig. I wish I could eat you!” Every pig loves to receive the ultimate pig compliment and Sammy was no exception.

There was one man that Sammy would often meet up and down the streets, and he was called Rabbi Goldblatt. They would always have such a lovely chat about what the family was up to and the Rabbi’s congregation. However, to Sammy’s dismay, the Rabbi never gave him the full ultimate pig compliment. He would always leave with the second-rate compliment of “Wow Sammy, you’re such a beautiful fat pig.” Why was that? Of course, Rabbi Goldblatt could never eat Sammy because he wasn’t kosher!

Sammy received the ultimate pig compliment from everyone but Rabbi Goldblatt. This upset Sammy so much – how could he get the compliment he wanted out of the Rabbi? Sammy came up with a plan. He popped into his friend’s Fancy Dress Shop and asked for an extra, extra large cow costume. If he dressed as a cow, the Rabbi would be fooled into thinking that he was kosher and would pay him the ultimate compliment.

The next day, Sammy took to the streets proudly dressed as a fine fat cow. Everyone he met said, “Wow Sammy, you’re such a beautiful fat

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cow. I wish I could eat you!” Sammy loved every moment of it. Then Rabbi Goldblatt caught his eye. They had a friendly chat and then just before parting ways, the Rabbi said, “Wow Sammy, you’re such a beautiful fat cow. I wish I could eat you!” Sammy was overcome with joy and in the excitement exclaimed, “YOU KNOW WHAT RABBI? YOU CAN EAT ME!!! GO AHEAD AND EAT ME!!!”

The Rabbi couldn’t stop thinking about how tasty his cholent would be with Sammy inside, so he agreed and took Sammy home with him. He excitedly called his friend, Yankel the Shochet, to come round with his knife to shecht Sammy in the correct way. Sammy was still on such a high from receiving the ultimate compliment, that he was unaware of the consequences of his actions. Yankel came round, pulled out his big knife and raised it over Sammy’s head. As he brought the knife down he suddenly paused and exclaimed, “Hold on a second – this is no cow – this is a pig dressed up as a cow!” The zip on Sammy’s cow costume had given it away.

Sammy removed his costume and the Rabbi realised that it was in fact Sammy the pig, his old buddy, and not Sammy the cow. The Rabbi turned to Yankel and Sammy and said, “I think we can learn something very important from this whole episode”.

“What’s that?” Sammy asked.

“If you’re a pig, you’re a pig. If you’re a cow, you’re a cow. But you can’t be something that you’re not. We should all be proud of the way Hashem made us and not try to behave like something we’re not. Anyway, we always get caught out when we pretend to be something else, just like you, Sammy.”

## Judging for the best

Gideon Shaw

Even if people themselves are careful not to speak lashon hara, what should they do if they hear a nasty fact about someone? What if it seems really likely? What if you don't want to be friends with someone who would do such a thing? The Gemara says that we should not automatically accept the fact as being true. Rather, the rule is "innocent until proven guilty".

There is a famous story about Rabbi Shmuel Shtrashun. He had a fund to lend money to poor people. One day while the rabbi was studying, the local tailor came in to repay his loan of 10,000 roubles. The rabbi was so engrossed in his learning that he stuck the money in the book and forgot about it.

A week later, the rabbi was looking over the books and noticed that the 10,000 rouble loan was never paid. So he called the tailor and told him to pay up. "But I paid you back last week!" said the tailor. "Okay, then where's your receipt?" asked the rabbi, who truly didn't remember being paid back. "You were studying and I didn't want to disturb you!" replied the tailor.

Soon enough word got out that the tailor and the rabbi were involved in a financial dispute. "The nerve of this man to argue with the rabbi!" the community said. The tailor's reputation was ruined and the community shunned him. No one wanted to speak to this disgusting person who had tried to rip off the rabbi.

About a year later, the rabbi was reviewing the same section of Gemara and came across an envelope containing 10,000 roubles. He realised it must have been from the tailor, and worked out what had happened! He immediately called the tailor and apologised for the misunderstanding. "But your apology doesn't help me," he said sadly. "My reputation is ruined forever!" "Don't worry," said the rabbi. "I'll make a public announcement in the synagogue, letting everyone know that it was I who had made the mistake." "But that won't

help,” said the tailor. “They’ll think you’re just saying it because you feel sorry for me.”

The rabbi thought long and hard until he came up with a solution. “You have a daughter and I have a son,” he said. “Let’s arrange for them to be married. In that way, everyone will be assured that you are fully trustworthy, for otherwise I would never agree to this match.” And with that, the harm was repaired.

Obviously not all of us can go to such lengths to repair the damage to someone’s reputation. But in a way we can all have a similar effect to the rabbi in the story. By being “dan l’caf zechut”, giving someone the benefit of the doubt, you avoid the need for someone’s reputation to be repaired at all. You never damaged it in the first place. So next time you hear someone has done something that sounds a bit dodgy, think of what their possible explanation could be. Wouldn’t you want other people to do the same for you?

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## The power of speech

Olivia Taylor

There was once, during the reign of King Shlomo, a Persian king who fell severely ill. The only cure, which his doctors could suggest to restore the king’s failing health, was to drink the milk of a lioness.

At a loss as to how to obtain a lioness’s milk, the king sent money and messengers to King Shlomo, who was world renowned for his wisdom, begging him to contrive a plan to ascertain how some lioness’s milk could be obtained.

Shlomo entrusted this task to his advisor Benayahu ben Yehoyada. Benayahu requested ten goats and asked one of Shlomo’s servants to search the forest for a lion’s den. When one was found, Benayahu, standing at a safe distance from the den, threw in a goat, which was instantly devoured by the lioness.

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The next day Benayahu ventured a few steps nearer to the den and threw in another goat. He repeated the procedure daily, drawing a little nearer to the den each day until the lioness was used to his presence. Eventually she abandoned all suspicion and Benayahu was able to milk her.

On receiving the milk, Shlomo ordered Benayahu to go and present it to the Persian king. During the journey, the servant's limbs started to argue as to who should receive the praise for having accomplished the feat of obtaining the milk.

The feet began to boast: "We are superior to all the other limbs, for had we not walked to the den, the milk could not have been acquired."

"Not true," objected the hands. "Had we not milked the lioness, we would not have the milk now."

"What about us?" protested the eyes. "Did we not discover the den? Without us the whole task could not have been accomplished!"

"You ignore me," complained the heart. "I was the one who thought of this brilliant idea in the first place!"

The uproar was interrupted by the tongue, which broke in saying, "You are all worth nothing – if not for me, where would you be?"

At this, all the limbs protested, "How dare you compare yourself to us? You are just a soft lump confined to a dark cave!"

Insulted, the tongue responded, "Just wait and see that I am master of you all."

The messenger arrived at the Persian king's palace and was hurried to the throne. He presented the milk and wanted to deliver a message from King Shlomo, but instead, the words tumbling from his mouth were, "I herewith present you, O Majesty, the dog's milk, which you requested."

The king thinking that he was being ridiculed flew into a rage and ordered the man to be hanged immediately. The poor man was led to the gallows with all his limbs in a state of terror upon which the tongue declared triumphantly: "Do you now see, that compared to me, none of you matter?"

"We confess it," cried all the limbs at once. "You command life and death."

The tongue was satisfied and cried out, "I have an urgent message to convey to the king. Please take me back to him for one moment!" On hearing this, the guards took the man back to the king.

"Why should I be executed?" the messenger asked.

"You bought me dog's milk," shouted the king.

"I assure you," replied the messenger, "that is the milk that will cure you. My words were but a slip of the tongue since in our country, the same word is used for a dog and a lion".

The king believed him, drank the milk and was cured. Thereafter, he forgave the messenger.

What can we learn from this story?

This story displays the importance of what we say. Sometimes we do not realise the significance of our words and how much suffering or embarrassment we can cause with a few badly chosen ones. So think before you speak.

## Lashon Hara

Gemma Renshaw

A woman repeated a bit of gossip about her neighbour. Within a few days the whole community knew the story. The person it concerned was deeply hurt and offended. Later, the woman responsible for spreading the rumour learned that it was completely untrue. She was very sorry and went to her Rabbi to find out what she could do to repair the damage.

“Go to the marketplace,” he said, “and purchase a chicken, and have it killed. Then on your way home, pluck its feathers and drop them one by one along the road.” Although surprised by this advice, the woman did as she was told.

The next day the Rabbi said, “Now, go and collect all those feathers you dropped yesterday and bring them back to me.” The woman followed the same road, but to her dismay the wind had blown all the feathers away. After searching for hours, she returned with only three in her hand. “You see,” said the Rabbi, “it’s easy to drop them, but it’s impossible to get them back. So it is with gossip. It doesn’t take much to spread a rumour, but once you do, you can never completely undo the wrong.”

In the parasha of Metzora we learn that for only one sin did God immediately strike the transgressor with the symptoms of the tzara’at (leprosy). That sin was not murder, idolatry, or immorality. Rather, it was lashon hara, evil speech about a fellow man, forbidden by the Torah. Why is the sin of lashon hara so severe that it was punished with leprosy in its most extreme form?

If someone speaks lashon hara, he is considered equivalent to somebody who denies the Almighty and transgresses the entire Torah. Hashem says concerning him, “I and he cannot coexist in the world!”

All the books of the Torah advocate chesed, the performance of kindness with one’s fellow being. Downgrading another Jew is

consequently diametrically opposed to the philosophical foundations of the Torah.

According to the Rabbis, lashon hara kills three people: the speaker, the listener and the one being spoken about.

A person is confronted daily with countless occasions for speaking lashon hara. The tongue is the organ which, of all the limbs and organs, moves with the least difficulty and the greatest speed. Consequently, lashon hara is one of the sins committed most frequently. Chafetz Chaim explains that the tongue was created with the ability to move more swiftly than all the other organs as a special kindness of Hashem. The reward for every word of Torah spoken surpasses that of all other mitzvot. Therefore, Hashem, in His kindness, enabled a person to speak thousands of words within minutes in order to ensure that he could gain the greatest possible reward.

How can we fortify ourselves, in modern society, against the temptation to speak lashon hara? The midrash offers several thoughts which serve as valuable pieces of advice. Our sages teach that every word that leaves a person's mouth is taped in Heaven. One day, all his words will be played back to him. He will then attempt to excuse himself before the Heavenly Tribunal by claiming, "I was not aware of the gravity of the transgression; I did not sin wilfully." He will, however, be answered, "Too late now! It was your duty to realise that each of your statements, whether good or evil, pronounced purposely or unintentionally, was put on record." A person should realise that a word once spoken does not evaporate in the air without leaving a trace, and therefore need not be taken seriously. On the contrary. Every spoken word etches out a mark for eternity which cannot be erased.

A person should consider the special position that the Almighty assigned to the tongue. Hashem reprimands the tongue, "O deceitful tongue! Why do you constantly wag even though I placed you in a position which is different from that of all other limbs and organs in the human body?! I placed the other limbs in an upright or slanted position, whereas you lie in the mouth horizontally, in a resting

position". This suggests that the tongue's natural position is one of rest; it should not be constantly in motion. "Moreover," says the Almighty to the tongue, "I imprisoned you. I walled you in with two enclosures (to warn your master not to let you loose), an inner wall of teeth and an outer barrier of flesh, the lips which confine you. With how many more barricades must I still block you to restrain you from speaking evil?"

Furthermore, why does the human finger fit precisely into the hole of one's ear? It was created in this manner so that, if a person hears gossip or vain talk, he can insert his finger in his ear and refuse to listen.

In order to brace oneself against slanderous speech, a person must acquaint himself with the major tragedies that such speech has caused through the generations:

- The serpent in Gan Eden slandered the Creator by proclaiming to Chava, "He forbids you to eat from the Tree of Knowledge fearing that you may become like Him and create worlds too!" These words brought death to all mankind. The Creator branded the snake with two physical marks for its evil speech. He covered its hide with white spots which resemble leprosy, and split its tongue, exclaiming, "Rasha! Looking at your split tongue, the human race will recall that you were the first ever to speak lashon hara!"
- All the troubles that befell Yosef resulted from his having spoken lashon hara about his brothers.
- In the wilderness, our forefathers tested the Almighty with Ten Trials and made a Golden Calf. Yet He did not condemn them to death in the wilderness because of the Sin of the Golden Calf. Of the Ten Trials, the one which sealed their fate involved lashon hara, namely the incident of the spies who gave a bad report about Eretz Yisrael.

- If not for David's accepting lashon hara, his kingdom would not have been divided and the Ten Tribes would not have been exiled from their Land.
- During the existence of the second Beit Hamikdash, Jews hated each other without cause. This hatred led them to speak lashon hara about each other. The severe punishments, destruction of the Temple and exile, were caused by the sin of lashon hara.

To be saved from lashon hara, one should pray daily to Hashem for assistance, saying, "My Lord, guard my tongue from evil!"

There are two good habits which, if once adopted, will help one to be less prone to speaking and listening to lashon hara;

If he is capable of studying Torah, he should do so. Torah study is a prevention against lashon hara in two ways. Firstly, lashon hara is usually spoken by people who sit around idly and are in need of some interesting topic to divert them from the dullness and boredom of everyday routine. They enjoy all sensational news, even at someone else's expense. One who is occupied with Torah study will find that his mind is absorbed in the thrill and constant novelty of that experience. Not only will he have food for thought, but he will desire to communicate his Torah learning to others. Consequently, his conversation will revolve around Torah topics, and he will not need to speak about other people.

Another reason why our Sages advise Torah study as a means of avoiding lashon hara, is the fact that Torah is an antidote for all kinds of yitzrai hara. The very act of "labouring in Torah" possesses the intrinsic power of purifying and cleansing a person's mind, thus making him less vulnerable to the temptation of sin.

Our Sages explain that words of Torah which emanate from unclean lips are not acceptable by Heaven. The merit of a slanderer's Torah study, instead of being granted to the scholar, will be credited to the victim of his slander. An unlearned person can reduce his tendency towards lashon hara by becoming more humble.

The enjoyment obtained by maligning another, psychologically analysed, is the feeling of superiority. Downgrading someone else through lashon hara brings the speaker a spurious sense of gratification, a sense that he is better than someone else. In his heart, he congratulates himself that he is not guilty of the other's vices or offences. However, were he to look at himself objectively, he would have to admit that he too possesses faults and is far from perfect. He should adopt a forgiving attitude towards his fellow man, overlook mistakes and refrain from announcing them to a third party. With humility, he can begin to judge others favourably. Hence, to avoid lashon hara, personal humility is a prerequisite.

I have no respect for justice.

I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.

I am cunning, malicious and gather strength with age.

The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.

I flourish at every level of society.

My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.

To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody's friend.

Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.

I topple governments and wreck marriages. I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion. I spawn suspicion and generate grief. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. Even my name hisses.

I am called GOSSIP. Office gossip – shop gossip – party gossip – telephone gossip. I make headlines and headaches.

REMEMBER, great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, shallow minds discuss people. Which one are you?

## Sheva Brachot

Danny Seal

Our sages saw parallels between many of the practices of a Jewish wedding, and Hashem giving the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. The groom is brought to the wedding canopy prior to the bride, where he awaits for her. Hashem too, descended in the early morning upon Mount Sinai. He waited for the Jewish people to arise and come to the base of the mountain, where He gave them the Torah and they became “wedded” to Him. In Shemot the Torah writes “And they (the Jewish people) stood under the mountain”. Our sages teach “the Holy One held the mountain over their heads as a wedding canopy”.

Both the bride and groom are brought to the wedding canopy escorted, one set for him, and one set for her. So, too, it is written in Devarim about the giving of the Torah, “And He approached with some of the holy myriads.” Hashem was accompanied to Mount Sinai by hosts of His angels, and the angels also escorted Israel there. A glass is broken during the ceremony; Moshe Rabbenu broke the first set of tablets upon descending from the mountain. Moshe did so in response to the people’s sin for worshipping the golden calf. They violated Hashem’s covenant. Breaking the glass under the wedding canopy serves as a reminder for the couple to take great care that they do not do anything to break the covenant which they are entering together.

There are often candles at the wedding ceremony, reminiscent of the fire and lightning that was seen at Mount Sinai, as it is written in Shemot, “And there was thunder and lightning”. Some people have the minhag that candles are carried by each of the escorts, which accompany the bride and groom.

A beautiful lesson lies in this custom. Our Neshamot are the light of our being. The numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Candle” (Ner) is 250. The number of limbs in a man’s body is 248 (also, it is the number of positive commandments in the Torah), and the number in a woman is 252. As long as the two are not married, their

inner light cannot shine, for the man is “missing” two and the woman has two extra. Once a couple is united in marriage, what ever the man was missing is provided by his Kallah, while a woman’s surplus is given to her Chatan. When they are united they finally become a “candle” (250), and together they will shine together as one!





## Pray from the heart

Daniel Sueke

A long time ago, there lived a Jewish peasant boy. This boy was so poor that he was never able to go to school or cheder. From a young age he had to work in the fields, so his family could buy some bread to eat.

On one occasion he came to the big town to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. He didn't know how to pray. He could not even read the letter Alef. He only saw that everyone was travelling to the synagogues to participate in the holy prayers. He thought, "If everybody is going to town I must go too!"

He arrived at the town synagogue with his father and watched the congregants crying and singing together, swaying to and fro. He turned to his father and asked, "Father, what is this all about?"

His father turned to him and said, "The Holy One blessed be He sits enthroned in the heavens and we pray all year long to Him. We especially pray during these two days of Rosh Hashanah when the whole world is being judged and each person is being judged for the rest of the year."

The son responded, "Father, what am I to do since I do not know how to pray?" His father quickly said to him condescendingly, "All you have to do is be quiet and listen to the other Jews praying. That is enough for you."

"But Father, if I don't know what these people are saying how is that going to effect God's decision? How is being silent going to help me?"

His father became unnerved and blurted out, "Listen, you should be quiet so no one will know you're an ignorant peasant!"

The son stood still for a couple of minutes as his father and the rest of the congregation continued praying, and then – the young boy stood up and spoke loudly.

“I am going to pray to God in the way I know best. I will whistle to God as I whistle to my flock of sheep.” He began whistling the sweet calling, as most shepherds know. His father turned red in the face: he was so enraged. The boy continued whistling with all his might, oblivious to what other people thought.

Now, it happened to be, that this particular Rosh Hashanah, all the heavenly gates were shut and suddenly, because of this pure whistling of the heart, all the gates burst open. The prayers of Israel were finally heard.

We can learn a very deep message from this story. Often when we’re in shul, and we turn around and see people swaying to and fro and being very engrossed in their prayer, it can be off-putting. After all, we may think: “How can I aspire to such a level of concentration and emotion?”

We have to realize that the important thing is that the prayer should be pure and of utmost kavanah (intention). It should not just be an act, “a lip-service”. After all, the most powerful prayer of all is the one which emanates directly from the heart.

## The power of prayer

Gemma Renshaw

If you could ask for anything from Hashem, what would it be? In the parasha of Vayechi we realise that Yaakov was the first person in history to become seriously ill. However, his illness was of his own doing, a result of his request to Hashem. In fact, all of our forefathers made similar requests to Hashem:

Before Avraham's time, all people looked young until they died. Avraham demanded from Hashem that he should be given physical signs of old age, arguing, "If a father and a son look alike, how will people know which of them to honour if they enter a place together? Distinguish a man by signs of old age such as white hair and wrinkles, and the people will know whom to respect." Hashem answered, "I swear, you asked for a good thing! I shall begin with you." Avraham then began to look like an old man, and all mankind after him was given external signs of old age.

Before Yitzchak's time, no-one ever experienced pain. Then Yitzchak came and demanded suffering. He said to Hashem, "If a person dies without the experience of pain, the full strictness of Heavenly judgement will be applied against him. But pains in this world will spare him from Gehinnom – punishment in the World to Come." Hashem replied, "I swear, you asked for a good thing, and I will begin with you!" Subsequently, Yitzchak turned blind.

Yaakov asked for illness prior to death, arguing with Hashem, "If a man dies suddenly, he is unable to give instructions to his sons beforehand and settle his affairs. Allow for a preparatory time of sickness before death, and he will have time to make all necessary arrangements." Said Hashem, "I swear, you asked for a good thing; I will begin with you." Yaakov consequently became the first man to be taken ill before his death.

Until King Chizkiyahu's time, there was no fatal sickness from which people recuperated. Chizkiyahu prayed to Hashem, "If a man remains healthy until his death, he will be forgetful of teshuva. But someone

who becomes dangerously ill will do teshuva in the hope that he will then recover.” Said Hashem, “I swear, you asked for a good thing! I shall begin with you!” Chizkiyahu was then stricken with a severe illness and later recuperated.

This Midrash is a most striking guide for our day and age. If we would be allowed to utter one wish to Hashem, for what would we ask? We would most certainly express our desire for eternal youth, health, happiness, and so on. The Midrash tells us that our forefathers demanded just the opposite; they demanded to look old, to be given suffering and illness!

Why did they react differently? The answer is that we attribute major importance to well-being in this world. Our forefathers, however, were constantly aware that the goal of our existence is Olam Habah. They therefore requested whatever would promote spiritual well-being and rejected anything that might be detrimental to the welfare of the neshama.

## Jerusalem: windows to world peace

Adina Rawson

For thousands of years, Jews have always prayed towards Jerusalem. The Talmud says:

“One should only pray in a house that has windows, as it says (about Daniel praying in Babylon): ‘He had windows in his upstairs room, open towards Jerusalem.’” [Brachot 34]

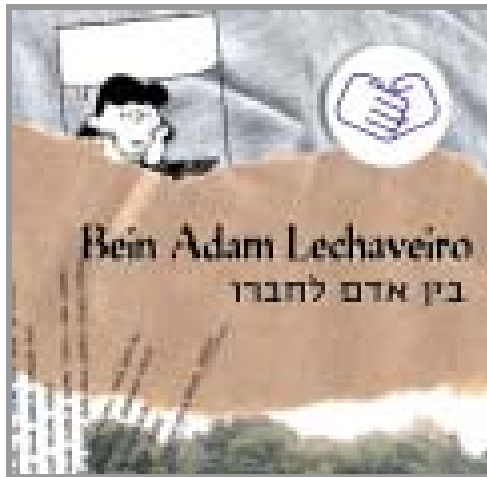
This passage raises the following questions:

- Why are windows needed for prayer? Isn't prayer a private exercise of the soul, where we concentrate inwards?
- Why did Daniel have his windows facing Jerusalem?

While prayer is an internal function of the soul, it is critical that one recognizes the value of relating to the outside world. If introspection and private prayer lead a person to reject all connections to the outside world, he has missed the highest goal of prayer. The power of prayer cannot be fully realised by monks in a monastery, cut off from the world. Prayer should rejuvenate one to act in righteousness and integrity, and encourage us to reassess the extent to which we are fulfilling our purpose in this world. Therefore the room where one prays must have windows, to emphasise one's obligations towards the society in which we live.

While we demonstrate our connection to the world, we nonetheless direct ourselves and our prayers towards Jerusalem. Prayer that paves the way to true global happiness must be directed towards the ultimate symbol of peace – Jerusalem – the city of peace itself.

“From Zion the Torah will come forth, and God's Word from Jerusalem.”



## Pride and prejudice

Natasha Remington

A modern orthodox guy was sitting on a train when a Lubavitch man, wearing the traditional garb, boarded the train and sat down next to him. The modern orthodox man started shouting at the Lubavitch man in Yiddish.

“You disgust me!” he exclaimed, “why do you have to walk around with your peiyot and black clothes, you are a disgrace to Judaism!”

The Lubavitch man was shocked, but decided he should teach the other man a lesson, so he looked confused and replied in English: “I’m sorry but I don’t understand what you’re saying. I’m Amish, I don’t understand the language you are using.”

The modern orthodox man was also shocked at this point and said, “I’m so sorry, I misunderstood the situation. I think it’s wonderful how you have kept the same traditions going all these years and still wear the same clothes. It’s really beautiful how you have not been affected by modernisation.”

At this point the Lubavitch man stood up to leave the train but as he left he turned around and said, in Yiddish: “From one Jew to another, I wish you a good day.”

The man was struck by his own hypocrisy and fully understood the lesson he had been taught. We are told in the Torah 36 times to love our neighbour or love the stranger. To do this we must love not only non-Jews but all types of Jews as well, and lose any prejudices that we may have.

## Ahavat Yisrael: how much can you love your fellow?

Adina Rawson

*"Do not take revenge nor bear a grudge against the children of your people. You must love your neighbour as you love yourself."*

[Lev 19:18]

Is this mitzvah of 'Ahavat Yisrael' realistic? Is it truly possible to love another person as much as we love ourselves?

Rav Kook spoke much about loving the people of Israel. He emphasised that it is not just a matter of emotions. Learning precisely how to love the people of Israel and defend their actions (both of individuals and of the entire nation) is a complex sphere of Torah study. It requires deep and multifaceted wisdom, nourished and enlightened from the Torah of kindness. Rav Kook gave some practical advice on how to achieve Ahavat Yisrael:

- If we truly perceive the good side of every individual, we come to love them with an inner love. Then it is not necessary to 'whitewash' or ignore faults. By concentrating on the positive characteristics, which are always evident, the negative aspects vanish in time.

- We need to deepen our awareness of the inner connection that binds together all the souls of Israel throughout the generations. As Rav Kook wrote:

*"Listen to me, my people. From the very depths of my soul I speak to you. I call out to you from the living connection by which I am bound to all of you, and all of you are bound to me. I feel this more deeply than any other feeling: that only you – all of you, all of your souls, throughout all of your generations – you alone give meaning to my life."*

Here is a story from the days when Rav Kook served as Chief Rabbi, which demonstrates just how deeply he felt this connection...

A vocal group of ultra-orthodox Jerusalemites vociferously opposed Rav Kook, due to his positive attitude towards secular Zionists. Often they would publicise posters along the city streets, attacking the Chief Rabbi and discrediting his authority.

One day Rav Kook was returning from a Brit Mila ceremony in Jerusalem's Old City, accompanied by dozens of students. Suddenly a small group of hot-headed students fell upon the rabbi, showering him with waste water. The Chief Rabbi was completely drenched by the filthy water. Emotions soared, and tempers flared.

By the time Rav Kook had arrived home, news of the attack had spread throughout the city. Prominent citizens arrived to express their repugnance at the shameful incident. One of the visitors was the legal counsel of the British Mandate. He advised Rav Kook to press charges against the hooligans, and promised to ensure that they would be promptly deported from the country.

The legal counsel was astounded by Rav Kook's response. *"I have no interest in court cases. Despite what they did to me, I love them, I am ready to kiss them, so great is my love! I burn with love for every Jew."*

## Every person counts

Daniel Jacobson

An old man was walking along a beach, when he noticed that the tide of the previous night had caused thousands upon thousands of shellfish to be swept onto the beach, the whole way across the seafront. The sight was powerful, and he felt slightly bad that all these shellfish would surely die as they were being left out of the water. However there was nothing anyone could do to help the situation as the sheer amount of shellfish was more than anyone could deal with. So he carried on his walk down the seafront.

As he walked he saw a teenager who was standing on the beach picking up individual shellfish and throwing them into the water. "What are you doing?" called out the old man.

"Saving the shellfish!" replied the teenager.

"Youthful ignorance!" the old man countered. "Don't you realise that you are wasting your time, there are so many shellfish, and you could never save them all?"

The teenager picked up one shellfish and threw it back into the sea. He then turned to the old man and said, "To that one, I made a difference."

## Values

Rebecca Fisher

If you're ever disappointed with your lot in life, think about this story. A little boy called Jamie was trying out for a part in a school play. His mother explained that he'd set his heart on being in it, yet she feared he would not be chosen. On the day the parts were awarded, she went to collect him after school. Jamie rushed up to her, eyes shining with pride and excitement. "Guess what Mum," he shouted, and then he said those words which shall forever be a lesson to us: "I've been chosen to clap and cheer."

As little Jamie did, we should not dwell on the negative, but should seek the goodness in every situation we are faced with.

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## Treat everyone equally

Michael Rainsbury and Rafi Saltman

One day, a man called Leib was travelling home on a Friday, when unfortunately there was a train delay, and he couldn't get to his station in time for Shabbat. So he decided to get off at Radin, many stops earlier, and go to his cousin's house for Shabbat. His cousin was none other than the Chafetz Chaim, one of the greatest rabbis of the time.

When he got there, the Chafetz Chaim's wife answered the door. "Of course you can stay for Shabbat", she said, "but my husband has already gone to Shul to learn before the service. Would you like to rest for a while first?" Leib was very relieved as he was very tired and he slept.

Later on, he woke up, and immediately, the Chafetz Chaim came into the room, saying "You're just in time for the Friday night meal". They ate and drank and had a very nice meal, and afterwards they all went to bed. However after getting into bed, Leib couldn't sleep. He tried

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and tried, but he gave up, and went into the kitchen for a glass of water. Then he noticed the time on the clock on the wall. It said 4am. That was strange, Leib thought. Had they been eating that long?

In the morning, Leib decided to ask the Rebbetzin about the time on the clock. "Surely we hadn't finished eating *that* late?" Leib asked. "Yes we did," said the Rebbetzin. "You see, when my husband came home from Shul, you were fast asleep. We waited and waited but you would not wake up. So our son Aharon made Kiddush and we ate part of the Friday night meal. Then the Chafetz Chaim learnt until you woke up. He woke me up and together we ate the rest of the meal". Leib was amazed at the kindness of the great Chafetz Chaim, and with how much respect he treated other people.

In Parashat Mishpatim, there are various laws regarding treatment of slaves. Although slaves occupy a lower class and do not share the same rights as free men, nevertheless they are our fellow human beings. Chazal even say that if you have one bed in your house, you should give it to the slave. Just like the Chafetz Chaim, who stayed up the whole night just to allow his cousin to enjoy a Shabbat meal, and just as there are strict laws regarding the treatment of slaves, so we should treat everyone around us with honour and respect, regardless of their status or character.

## Being a Mensch

Baruch Baigel

There are two things that we learn from a young age. One is to be 'frum' – to go to shul, say the shema, wear a kippa, etc. The second is to be a mensch – to help old ladies across the road, be polite – that type of thing. This is all very nice, but we make a distinction between two disciplines that should essentially be one and the same.

In Parashat Mishpatim there is an account of Jewish civil law prescribing the way in which Jews should treat other people. The detailed laws of Nezikin, of what a person has to do when he damages another's body or property, and the laws of honest business dealings are listed. However, one of the most important letters in the parasha is the 'vav' (the conjunction 'and') in the phrase "V'Eileh Hamishpatim", "*And* these are the laws." This conjunction functions to connect Mishpatim to the previous parsha, Yitro, where Moshe receives the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Rashi comments on "*And* these are the laws" comes to add onto the previous section – "just as the previous section is from Sinai so is this section from Sinai".

In the halachot of Kriat Shema the mishna rules on the earliest time that one can recite the shema. The gemara quotes the opinion of the "Acherim", which is the halacha we subscribe to today – "From the time it is light enough to be able to see one's friend from a distance of four amot and recognise him." One can only accept "ol malchut shamayim" – the yoke of heavenly kingship – and make the basic statement of Jewish religious life if one recognises and is sensitive to the feelings and the needs of others outside one's own daled amot and immediate environment. This theme continues in the actual halachot of Kriat Shema. If I am saying the shema and someone comes up to me and says hello, I am able to stop in between the paragraphs, interrupt the recital and answer hello back (warning – this is not detailed enough to be halacha – ask your local Rabbi).

All in all, to be frum one needs also to be a mensch.

## The secret of Gan Eden

Gemma Renshaw

There is a parable of a person who was taken on a tour of Gehinnom (Hell) and Gan Eden (Paradise). To his great surprise, he saw in Gehinnom a magnificent banqueting hall and tables laden with all kind of delicacies, but the 'celebrants' were starving. What was the reason? They had very long knives and forks tied to their arms. Consequently, they could not bring the delicious food to their mouths. Soldiers were on guard to supervise the use of the cutlery provided.

When later he was taken to Gan Eden, the very same spectacle presented itself. However, there the celebrants enjoyed themselves thoroughly. What was the reason? They fed one another across the table!

What do we learn from this short parable? To only look after oneself, is Gehinnom. However, to share with others is truly Gan Eden.

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## Compromise: the key to success

Benjy Behrman

One of the most famous and most quoted mishnayot from Pirkei Avot is chapter one, mishna six:

'Make for yourself a Rabbi, acquire for yourself a friend and judge everyone favourably.' What does this mean? I have always been told that you can't buy your friends, and what do friends have to do with Rabbis and judging people?

It is clear therefore, that this mishna has a much deeper meaning, and certainly not one that gives good advice for a failing social life. When the mishna says 'Make for yourself a Rabbi', this refers not just specifically to the choice of Rabbi, but rather refers to the ideological choices one makes in life. The 'Rabbi' is thus a metaphor for an

ideology. When making this ideological choice one should not compromise or sacrifice anything in its pursuit. One should simply make for oneself a *Rav*, without giving anything in return.

However, when dealing with one's ideology as it is applied to society (represented by *chaver* in the mishna), one should not simply do it without giving anything. Instead one must *kneh*, acquire, an act which requires some sort of sacrifice, compromise or giving.

The message of the mishna is therefore extremely clear. It is all too easy to decide what the ideal is, but when we apply this to our community around us, it is not always that simple. The only way the mishna says that our ideals can be applied into practice is through compromise.

Oh, and by the way, how does the mishna say we should go about achieving this goal? 'Judge everyone in a favourable light'. Only by looking at the good in everyone can we begin to realise that 'my way' is not the 'only way'.

## Fluctuations in national redemption

Adina Rawson

On 17 Av 5689 (23 August 1929), Arab mobs began rioting all over Eretz Yisrael. The 'official' reason for the Arab violence was to jeopardise Jewish rights to the Kotel HaMa'aravi (the Western Wall). Dozens of Jewish communities were attacked, including those of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. In Chevron and Tzefat Arab mobs slaughtered Jews – men and women, infants and the elderly alike. Those who survived the slaughter were evacuated, as were the residents of Aza, Shechem, and Bet Shean. In a week of rioting and pogroms, 133 Jews were killed and more than 300 wounded. 17 communities were evacuated, and there was a great loss of Jewish property.

At that time of turmoil and troubled spirits, Rav Kook wrote the following words of encouragement:

*“Our Sages used an interesting phrase to describe ‘the light of the Mashiach’ the beginnings of Redemption. They said: ‘It appears, is obscured, and appears again.’*

What did they mean with this description of wavering, vacillating light?

We witness many fluctuations in the progressive renewal of the nation, and the settling of Eretz Yisrael. Every setback represents an obscuring of the redeemer. Every subsequent advance signifies his appearance. When one follows the development of the “Yishuv” from its inception until today, one sees that out of every reversal grows new triumph and success. Therefore we should not lose heart, even in the face of the current terrible situation that has befallen us. For in proportion to the present obscurity, the future revelation of light will be that much greater.