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Mussar HaTorah

Torah insights into human nature from the weekly parasha.

Based on the talks of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l (Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim - RSA) and dedicated in his memory. This week's Mussar HaTorah - a weekly parasha newsletter - can be downloaded at this link: <http://rs6.net/tn.jsp?e=001U5-q7oXBO->

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of **Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l**

“...But when you entered, you defiled My land, and made My heritage an abomination.” (Yirmiyahu 2:7)

The dedication day of the first Beis HaMikdash was a day of ecstatic joy and inspiration for the Jewish people. Yet, regarding that very same day, the Gemara (Nidah 70b) applies the pasuk (Yirmiyahu 32:31), “For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My fury from the day that they built it until today.” Why? On that day, the Gemara explains, Shlomo HaMelech married Pharaoh’s daughter. In another Gemara (Shabbos 56b), Chazal teach us that on that same day the angel Gavriel placed a reed in the sea, around which mud gathered and grew to become the place where Rome was later founded. On the very day that the Jewish people celebrated the construction of the Beis HaMikdash, the seeds of its future destruction were sown.

We know that Shlomo’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter was in accordance with halacha. She converted properly (Yevamos 76a) and as the Gemara in Shabbos (ibid.) states, “Whoever says Shlomo sinned is mistaken.” The Radak (Melachim I 11:1) explains that Pharaoh’s daughter did not have any negative influence on Shlomo at the time of their marriage. Only some forty years later, in his old age, when he married many other foreign women, did any misdeed occur. (Even then, Shlomo himself did not sin; but since Shlomo, in the weakness of his old age, did not stop these women from worshiping idolatry, he is held responsible – at his great spiritual level and according to the Torah’s lofty standards – as if he transgressed himself.)

This was a day of historic spiritual accomplishment, the consecration of the earthly abode of the Shechina, with unimaginable holiness and joy. It was the first of seven days of celebration, which included Yom Kippur, and superseded the fasting of that sacred day. In fact a Heavenly voice

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proclaimed to the people, who were concerned about having eaten on Yom Kippur: “You are all destined for the World-to-Come!” How could a slight misjudgment on Shlomo’s part, which was not an actual sin and only became a negative force more than three decades later, have turned this incredible day into one of Divine “anger and fury?” A small error in an overwhelming sea of kedusha and simcha for the Beis HaMikdash – how could that have laid the foundations for its destruction and all the bitter suffering of our centuries-long exile, which has included pogroms, Inquisitions, Holocaust, terror and bloodshed?

The leaders of Klal Yisrael are not merely ceremonial figureheads. They are the heart and soul of our nation. We look to them for guidance, instruction and inspiration, not only from their teaching, but more importantly, from their example. Their acts of righteousness uplift and ennoble our entire people, but their indiscretions can wreak national spiritual destruction, reflected in physical terms, that may affect generations to come.

While few of us are leaders on a national level, we can all have an impact on other Jews in our own positions of leadership: on our families, our employees and even our neighbors. People are influenced by the example we set, and we can raise them, or lower them, with our seemingly “small” actions. May we appreciate the power and the responsibility we have, and affect our fellow Jews in a positive way that will bring them closer to Hashem, and ultimately, closer to the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash speedily in our days.

Based on the talks of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l, Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim – RSA

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Jerusalem Post

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

**RABBI ALEXANDER ROSENBERG – THE TRULY KOSHER JEW**

Friday, August 1, 2008 Printer Friendly

King Solomon in Kohelet relates the parable of the anonymous wise man, poor in wealth and notoriety, who saves the besieged city through his advice and wisdom but is apparently soon forgotten by all who benefited from his wisdom and skill.

Jewish history is replete with myriad unsung heroes who “saved our city” but are mainly forgotten, even though generations of Jews are beholden to them because of their valor, wisdom and selflessness.

Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg, though he may still be remembered by the older generation of rabbis in this country and Israel, is at best a half-sung

hero. And that is probably exactly the way he would have wanted it to be. But these words of mine come not to eulogize Rabbi Rosenberg, but rather to describe how kashrut, in a practical sense, was saved and its banner and standards raised high in the Jewish world.

The Achilles' heel of the Orthodox rabbinate in America in the first six decades of intensive Jewish immigration to America was kashrut supervision. The chaos that surrounded kashrut matters is almost indescribable. The great Rabbi Yakov Yosef, who was elected as the first and the only Chief Rabbi of New York, was hounded to his premature death in 1902 by the conflicting forces battling for control of kosher food supplies in New York. Kashrut supervision fell into the hands of people – food manufacturers and distributors, butchers, slaughterhouse owners, questionable “rabbis,” and out and out charlatans – who were clearly into it for the dollar profits that could be extracted from the kosher consumer. The kashrut industry was also infiltrated by corrupt labor-union bosses and even by the capos of organized crime. There were individual rabbis who struggled heroically in their communities and neighborhoods to uphold the standards of kashrut, but for many it was a bruising and eventually losing battle.

At the root of this problem was the fact that there was no communal organization that could undertake and popularize a program of intensive kashrut supervision that would be free from the individual's need for personal profit and the pressure of the food manufacturers and purveyors for lowered standards of supervision.

The abysmally low salaries paid to American rabbis of the time, forced many otherwise great and honorable people into positions of silence and compromise in the field of kashrut supervision. The Orthodox Union began to deal with this problem, but it was not until the advent of Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg as the Rabbinic Kashrut Administrator of the OU that real progress was made in this field.

Rabbi Rosenberg, descended from a distinguished family of Hungarian rabbis, combined within himself old-world charm, a shrewd understanding of people and their true motives, an uncanny business sense, unimpeachable integrity, enormous compassion for individuals and a sense of public service that always allowed him to see the big picture and not just the narrow case in front of him.

Rabbi Rosenberg was an accomplished talmid chacham, someone who knew when and with whom to consult on matters of halacha and policy, and was the epitome of efficiency and rectitude in all of his dealings. But his greatest accomplishment was that wherever he went and with whomever he dealt, the experience always turned into a kiddush hashem.

Rabbi Rosenberg envisioned the day, which has arrived, where a Jew could walk into almost any supermarket in North America and purchase kosher food, supervised by the OU. Any Jew who has traveled anywhere in the United States – Alaska, Hawaii, Utah, North Dakota, literally anywhere – can well appreciate the service that Rabbi Rosenberg provided in guiding the OU in its formative years and popularizing the concept of kosher products distribution in the general food industry.

He would not allow compromises in kosher standards and yet unflinchingly understood the problems that many manufacturers of prepared food products had in meeting those standards. He always said to the managers of the food plants that were under OU supervision: “We are here to help you. We are not the problem, rather we are here to provide you with the solution.”

Many a product today is certified as kosher due to Rabbi Rosenberg's innovative spirit, quiet diplomacy and iron will. It was he who perfected and pioneered the system of the mass slaughtering of kosher poultry that, with further technological improvements and refinements, is de rigueur throughout the Jewish world today.

It was Rabbi Rosenberg who impressed upon major American food companies such as Colgate-Palmolive, H.J. Heinz, Rich's, Procter and Gamble, Best Foods and others the positive possibilities for them in kosher production and supervision. And it was his aristocratic manner, his handsome appearance and immaculate dress, his integrity, his wisdom and his faith that most impressed these non-Jewish concerns and won them over

to allow “rabbis to bless their machinery” and control their inventories and suppliers.

Rabbi Rosenberg loved Jews, all Jews, something which is not necessarily easy to accomplish when one is involved in the nitty-gritty of daily kashrut supervision and administration. He possessed enormous patience, forgave the personal slights cast upon him by spiteful and jealous people, and always looked for opportunities to help others.

Rabbi Rosenberg was a rabbinic representative to the Displaced Persons camps in Germany after World War II. There he was seen as a delivering angel, especially to the surviving rabbis and Chasidic leaders. When many of them arrived in America a few years later, Rabbi Rosenberg helped them become established by providing advice, money (he was notorious for being overly generous with regard to charity), jobs and personal encouragement. He would go to Williamsburgh and Boro Park in Brooklyn in the 1960's on chol hamoed and just stand there, watching the baby carriages, the holiday clothes, the parading generation after the Holocaust, smiling through his tears. It is no exaggeration to say that the basis for the many “chassidische hechsherim” which exist today was laid by Rabbi Rosenberg.

That is also true for many other current successful “private” kashrut supervising organizations, all of whom then, and probably still must do so today, relied on the OU for the basic raw materials for “their” products. Rabbi Rosenberg was magnanimous and generous to a fault, and if he felt that helping someone else's efforts and organization would aid the cause of authentic kashrut he would supply the necessary outside advice, judgment and experience.

I have purposely not burdened this article with numerous anecdotes regarding Rabbi Rosenberg, of which I have many. But I wish to conclude this assessment of Rabbi Rosenberg with the following tale: I was Rabbi Rosenberg's immediate successor as Rabbinic Administrator of the OU. In 1974, in the midst of the Arab oil boycott of the West in the wake of the Yom Kippur War (remember those good old days?) one of the two main suppliers of kosher glycerin in the United States had to discontinue its deliveries due to a shortage of oil.

An OU supervised company, a very large concern, called me in a panic. They had one hundred thousand labels with the OU printed on these labels; they currently had no other labels for their product; and therefore they would have to shut down their factory for two or three days until they could obtain non-OU labels. This would cause them substantial financial loss. I told them that I would try to help them.

I called the other supplier of kosher glycerin and explained the situation to the vice-president in charge of marketing. I asked him to sell a number of tank cars of glycerin to this company, even though it was not a regular customer. The vice-president thought it over for a moment and then agreed to do so and told me that the glycerin would be billed at the price schedule used for regular customers.

He then asked me: “Rabbi, do you think that Rabbi Rosenberg in heaven knows what I am doing for you?” This hard-nosed, non-Jewish businessman had no doubts that Rabbi Rosenberg is in heaven! Well, neither do I. On behalf of all us millions who find kosher food so readily and plentifully available, thank you, Rabbi Rosenberg.

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The Melacha of Sewing on Shabbat

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#### The Quality of the Stitch

The Mishna, K'la'im 9:10, implies that there is a relationship between the standards of sewing in order to violate the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez and in order to violate the melacha of tofer. As we discussed in a previous issue, according to many Rishonim, a garment of wool that is sewn together with a linen garment constitutes sha'atnez. The Mishna states that in order for two garments to be considered sewn together, a minimum of two stitches are required. As such, in order to violate the melacha of tofer on Shabbat, one must sew two stitches. This idea is reflected in the Mishna, Shabbat 73a, that describes the melacha as hatofer shteifot, one who sews two stitches.

The Gemara, Shabbat 74b, notes an important qualification of the melacha of tofer. All melachot have to exhibit some degree of permanence. If one sews two items together with only two stitches, it is very likely that the stitches will unravel. The Gemara concludes that in order to violate tofer with two stitches, one must tie a knot at both ends so that the stitches are permanent in nature.

Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 10:9, in codifying the statement of the Gemara, states that if one sews more than two stitches, he violates the melacha of tofer even if he doesn't tie both ends because such a stitch is inherently permanent. Rambam implies that the Gemara's requirement to knot both ends is not definitional to the melacha of tofer and is only a means of assuring the permanence of the stitch. Rambam, Shabbat 74b, s.v. V'hu, adds that in order to violate the melacha of tofer, the knot does not have to be a type of knot that would violate the melacha of kosher (tying). [Meiri, Shabbat 73a, states that by tying certain types of knots in order to secure the stitch one can potentially violate the melacha of kosher in addition to violating the melacha of tofer.]

#### The Difference between Tofer and Kosher

A number of Acharonim note that the melacha of kosher and the melacha of tofer seem to be one and the same. In both melachot, the purpose of the melacha is to bind two items together. If so, what is the practical difference between kosher and tofer?

R. Yechiel M. Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 317:18, suggests that the difference is that kosher is violated when one combines two items in a way that undoing the connection will restore the two items to their original form. Tofer is violated when one combines two items in a way that separating the two items requires destroying the point of connection.

R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:84, presents a similar answer to that of R. Epstein. He adds two points. First, even though a sewn item can be undone by removing the stitches, if the normal way of disconnecting the two pieces is through tearing, connecting the two parts is considered tofer. Second, there is another important difference between kosher and tofer. When one ties two items together, they remain two distinct items. When one sews two items together, they are perceived as one item. Therefore, kosher is defined as connecting two items, whereas tofer is defined as combining two items into one item.

#### Practical Applications

R. Feinstein's responsum discusses whether it is permissible to bind two items together using a safety pin. Based on his definition of tofer, he permits use of the safety pin because it does not serve to combine two items into one item and its removal does not require tearing. [Its use would not constitute a violation of the melacha of kosher because kosher has its own parameters which are beyond the scope of this article.] R. Feinstein admits that his opinion seems to be at odds with a comment of Korban Netanel, Shabbat 7:50. However, R. Feinstein suggests that Korban Netanel may agree to his approach.

R. Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, Shevet HaLevi 3:51, rejects the premise of R. Epstein and therefore adopts his understanding of the position of Korban Netanel that one may not attach two items using a pin on Shabbat. Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 15:70, accepts R. Feinstein's position. However, out of deference to the opinion of Korban Netanel, he suggests that one should connect the two items by only placing one hole in each of the garments. By doing so, it is considered only one "stitch." Therefore, even if one considers use of safety pins to be tofer, there is no biblical violation of the melacha because it is lacking two stitches.

Based on R. Feinstein's parameters for tofer, use of a zipper would not constitute a violation of tofer. However, R. Vosner, op. cit., and Shevet HaLevi 8:61, maintains that in principle, use of a zipper constitutes a violation of tofer. The only reason why it is ordinarily permissible to use a zipper on Shabbat is that in most cases the garment will be unzipped within a short amount of time. However, if one plans on keeping the two sides of the zipper together for a long time, it is prohibited to use the zipper. For this reason, R. Vosner prohibits attaching the lining of a coat to a coat using a zipper.

#### Stitches on a Human

When a person suffers a deep cut, there is often a need to sew the wound closed in order for it to heal properly. If the wound must be treated on Shabbat, the treatment constitutes pikuach nefesh (saving a life) and one must treat the wound on Shabbat. Suppose that the wound is on the face and in order to treat the wound only a few stitches are required, but in order to prevent a significant scar from forming, additional stitches are required. Those additional stitches are not for the purpose of preventing infection and ostensibly, the mandate to violate Shabbat for pikuach nefesh would not apply. Is it permissible to sew additional stitches on Shabbat?

R. Yitzchak Zilberstein, Torat HaYoledet (Chapter 34), in concurrence with R. Yechezkel Abramsky, suggests that the melacha of tofer does not apply to stitching human skin. As such, additional stitches would be permissible on Shabbat. R. Shlomo Z. Auerbach, Minchat Shlomo, Tinyana no. 35, disagrees and maintains that tofer does apply to stitching human skin. Nevertheless, R. Auerbach provides a leniency to sew additional stitches based on the principles of pikuach nefesh.

There is an additional factor relating to stitching human skin which may provide another leniency regarding the question of sewing additional stitches on Shabbat. R. Auerbach (cited in Shulchan Shlomo, Hilchot Shabbat Ch. 340 note 42) questions whether stitching of human skin should be categorized as tofer or boneh (building). He suggests that human stitching does not fit the classical definition of tofer because in ordinary stitching of garments it is the stitch that connects the two garments. If one removes the stitch, the two garments are separated. Regarding human stitching, the purpose of the stitches is to hold the two pieces of skin together temporarily while the skin heals. When the skin heals, the stitches can be removed and it will not affect the binding of the two pieces of skin. Therefore, it is possible that binding together two pieces of skin would be considered boneh and not tofer. [Rashi, Ketuvot 6b, s.v. Chayav, states that "fixing" a human constitutes a violation of boneh.]

If one assumes that human stitching is considered boneh and not tofer, one can suggest an additional leniency regarding sewing additional stitches on

Shabbat. If someone has a wound that needs to be treated on Shabbat, it is certainly permissible to bind the two pieces of skin together for the purpose of pikuach nefesh. Sewing additional stitches would not constitute a further violation of boneh because the pieces of skin will bind regardless of whether the additional stitches are sewn.

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### **Rabbi Josh Flug**

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#### The Quality of the Stitch

The Mishna, K'la'im 9:10, implies that there is a relationship between the standards of sewing in order to violate the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez and in order to violate the melacha of tofer. As we discussed in a previous issue, according to many Rishonim, a garment of wool that is sewn together with a linen garment constitutes sha'atnez. The Mishna states that in order for two garments to be considered sewn together, a minimum of two stitches are required. As such, in order to violate the melacha of tofer on Shabbat, one must sew two stitches. This idea is reflected in the Mishna, Shabbat 73a, that describes the melacha as hatofer shteif tefrot, one who sews two stitches.

The Gemara, Shabbat 74b, notes an important qualification of the melacha of tofer. All melachot have to exhibit some degree of permanence. If one sews two items together with only two stitches, it is very likely that the stitches will unravel. The Gemara concludes that in order to violate tofer with two stitches, one must tie a knot at both ends so that the stitches are permanent in nature.

Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 10:9, in codifying the statement of the Gemara, states that if one sews more than two stitches, he violates the melacha of tofer even if he doesn't tie both ends because such a stitch is inherently permanent. Rambam implies that the Gemara's requirement to knot both ends is not definitional of the melacha of tofer and is only a means of assuring the permanence of the stitch. Rambam, Shabbat 74b, s.v. V'Hu, adds that in order to violate the melacha of tofer, the knot does not have to be a type of knot that would violate the melacha of kosher (tying). [Meiri, Shabbat 73a, states that by tying certain types of knots in order to secure the stitch one can potentially violate the melacha of kosher in addition to violating the melacha of tofer.]

#### The Difference between Tofer and Kosher

A number of Acharonim note that the melacha of kosher and the melacha of tofer seem to be one and the same. In both melachot, the purpose of the melacha is to bind two items together. If so, what is the practical difference between kosher and tofer?

R. Yechiel M. Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 317:18, suggests that the difference is that kosher is violated when one combines two items in a way that undoing the connection will restore the two items to their original form. Tofer is violated when one combines two items in a way that separating the two items requires destroying the point of connection.

R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:84, presents a similar answer to that of R. Epstein. He adds two points. First, even though a sewn item can be undone by removing the stitches, if the normal way of disconnecting the two pieces is through tearing, connecting the two parts is considered tofer. Second, there is another important difference between kosher and tofer. When one ties two items together, they remain two distinct items. When one sews two items together, they are perceived as one item. Therefore, kosher is defined as connecting two items, whereas tofer is defined as combining two items into one item.

#### Practical Applications

R. Feinstein's responsum discusses whether it is permissible to bind two items together using a safety pin. Based on his definition of tofer, he permits use of the safety pin because it does not serve to combine two items into one item and its removal does not require tearing. [Its use would not constitute a violation of the melacha of kosher because kosher has its own parameters which are beyond the scope of this article.] R. Feinstein admits that his opinion seems to be at odds with a comment of Korban Netanel, Shabbat 7:50. However, R. Feinstein suggests that Korban Netanel may agree to his approach.

R. Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, Shevet HaLevi 3:51, rejects the premise of R. Epstein and therefore adopts his understanding of the position of Korban Netanel that one may not attach two items using a pin on Shabbat. Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 15:70, accepts R. Feinstein's position. However, out of deference to the opinion of Korban Netanel, he suggests that one should connect the two items by only placing one hole in each of the garments. By doing so, it is considered only one "stitch." Therefore, even if one considers use of safety pins to be tofer, there is no biblical violation of the melacha because it is lacking two stitches.

Based on R. Feinstein's parameters for tofer, use of a zipper would not constitute a violation of tofer. However, R. Vosner, op. cit., and Shevet HaLevi 8:61, maintains that in principle, use of a zipper constitutes a violation of tofer. The only reason why it is ordinarily permissible to use a zipper on Shabbat is that in most cases the garment will be unzipped within a short amount of time. However, if one plans on keeping the two sides of the zipper together for a long time, it is prohibited to use the zipper. For this reason, R. Vosner prohibits attaching the lining of a coat to a coat using a zipper.

## Stitches on a Human

When a person suffers a deep cut, there is often a need to sew the wound closed in order for it to heal properly. If the wound must be treated on Shabbat, the treatment constitutes pikuach nefesh (saving a life) and one must treat the wound on Shabbat. Suppose that the wound is on the face and in order to treat the wound only a few stitches are required, but in order to prevent a significant scar from forming, additional stitches are required. Those additional stitches are not for the purpose of preventing infection and ostensibly, the mandate to violate Shabbat for pikuach nefesh would not apply. Is it permissible to sew additional stitches on Shabbat?

R. Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Torat HaYoledet* (Chapter 34), in concurrence with R. Yechezkel Abramsky, suggests that the melacha of tofer does not apply to stitching human skin. As such, additional stitches would be permissible on Shabbat. R. Shlomo Z. Auerbach, *Minchat Shlomo*, Tinyana no. 35, disagrees and maintains that tofer does apply to stitching human skin. Nevertheless, R. Auerbach provides a leniency to sew additional stitches based on the principles of pikuach nefesh.

There is an additional factor relating to stitching human skin which may provide another leniency regarding the question of sewing additional stitches on Shabbat. R. Auerbach (cited in *Shulchan Shlomo*, *Hilchot Shabbat* Ch. 340 note 42) questions whether stitching of human skin should be categorized as tofer or boneh (building). He suggests that human stitching does not fit the classical definition of tofer because in ordinary stitching of garments it is the stitch that connects the two garments. If one removes the stitch, the two garments are separated. Regarding human stitching, the purpose of the stitches is to hold the two pieces of skin together temporarily while the skin heals. When the skin heals, the stitches can be removed and it will not affect the binding of the two pieces of skin. Therefore, it is possible that binding together two pieces of skin would be considered boneh and not tofer. [Rashi, *Ketuvot* 6b, s.v. Chayav, states that "fixing" a human constitutes a violation of boneh.]

If one assumes that human stitching is considered boneh and not tofer, one can suggest an additional leniency regarding sewing additional stitches on Shabbat. If someone has a wound that needs to be treated on Shabbat, it is certainly permissible to bind the two pieces of skin together for the purpose of pikuach nefesh. Sewing additional stitches would not constitute a further violation of boneh because the pieces of skin will bind regardless of whether the additional stitches are sewn.

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July 31, 2008

### **From Bear Stearns To Bava Metzia** By Andrew Neff

The title of this article is "From Bear Stearns to Bava Metzia" but it's really about some life lessons I've picked up over the last few months since my company – that I was with for 20 years and that was in business for 86 years – disappeared in the midst of a financial crisis and panic – making me a "Bear Stearns refugee" but more importantly a "kollel boy".

I am used to presenting to a financial crowd, so I will use my standard approach in my 25 years on Wall Street and start with my conclusions, and then work back to the beginning. This is the opposite style of most Torah commentaries, but I'm still new at this kollel life.

My conclusions? G-d runs the world. Your prayers are answered so think carefully about what you pray for. Think about your legacy. Every benefit has a cost and every cost has a benefit. Handling tests – it's easier than you think.

Lesson #1: G-d runs the world

When Bear Stearns collapsed, it shocked the world. It was not the normal course of events. Companies that are in business for 86 years without so much as a losing quarter (except for the last one) don't go out of business and they don't go out of business overnight. I have been amazed at the level of fascination with our demise and the circumstances surrounding our last days.

Many people have asked me if I knew or sensed what was happening. Actually, it was just the opposite. We knew we were having a bad year, but we were in cyclical business. We've had good years and bad years. In fact, my area – equities – was having a good year and the firm was profitable again – highlighting (we thought) the strength of the business model. Besides, we weren't going out of business...

But we went out of business. Whose fault was it? Was it our new CEO? Our ex-CEO? The shorts? The press?

I developed a different perspective. Let me digress with a reference to tehilim. The backdrop for the third perek of tehilim is rather unusual. Dovid Hamelech thanks Hashem during the rebellion of Avshalom. As I heard from Rav Yissocher Frand, the normal course of events is not for a son to rebel against the father. Usually it is a political opponent or an aide. But these circumstances – the rebellion by his son Avshalom – were extremely unusual. To Dovid, that was a sign that this rebellion was outside nature, outside teva and that Hashem was watching over him and was involved in Dovid's life and that G-d runs the world.

What happened to Bear Stearns was outside teva.

Until the demise of Bear Stearns, I knew what my schedule was going to be – more or less – for the next year or so. I was working on projects through the year 2010. I was firmly in control and I knew what the future would be.

But it wasn't to be. I learned that I was not in control. For many of us, we went through – l'havdil (if you can compare) – many of the signs associated with shiva. We were in denial, we were angry, we were depressed. Finally, we began to accept our situation.

I, too, went through these stages. I was in denial. I was angry. I was depressed. Because I was not in control.

I'm passed that now but I was only able to get beyond it because I came to realize Who is in control of the world. The events at Bear Stearns are all part of His plan. You can be angry with His plan but it doesn't change His plan. At one level, it's like going to a museum and getting angry at the exhibits. But that is a rather silly reaction because it doesn't change the exhibits so you may as well enjoy the museum.

Lesson #2 – Your prayers are answered so think carefully about what you pray for.

We are relative newcomers to Teaneck. We moved here about three years ago. I think the most important force one faces in life is peer pressure – for better or worse – so you have to focus carefully on what the peer pressures are where you live and work. In Teaneck, there is peer pressure to learn. Everyone does it. Every shul competes to have the best learning. The batei medrash (halls of study) are thriving and the shiurim attract crowds. That is one of the main reasons that we moved here.

I had often thought about taking some time off for learning. While my children are "frum from birth," Nancy and I are balei teshvot – I have done many things, but I essentially see myself as a bit of an idiot savant, that is, I have "done the daf" for over 10 years and attended multiple shiurim, but I had never learned the basics: tefilla, gemara without English on the other side, Chumash with Rashi and other meforshim.

I thought about taking a sabbatical. But I would only do it with these two conditions: I could not take off after a good year, since I needed just one more good year. And I could not take off after a bad year since I really needed a good year to take off. Outside of these two mutually exclusive conditions, I would take time off to learn.

I had started talking to Rabbi Eliyahu Roberts, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedola of Teaneck, several months ago. He and I had started learning gemara about once a week – on laws of taking interest – but I realized it was not enough to get me to where I wanted to be. So we began to talk about learning at the yeshiva with some of the boys one or two mornings a week. I think we started to talk about this last November or so. But – when it came down to it -- I could never find the time.

Hashem found the time for me. He cleared my entire schedule. Hashem opened up all of my mornings. Arranged a sabbatical year for me, so to speak.

As I mentioned a moment ago, I saw what happened to Bear Stearns as an “act of G-d.” As we learn though, we never know what G-d’s plan is and I certainly don’t know why Bear Stearns went out of business. But I knew that the message – whatever it is – is that something is supposed to change. It’s not business as usual. Ironically, I had a position if I wanted it at the new firm. In fact, the person who did what I did at JP Morgan coincidentally resigned the day Bear went out of business – for entirely unrelated reasons. So I could have glided from one spot to the next – from one vine to the next – with nary a glitch. But the emails we get from Hashem aren’t always so clear. That is where prayer comes in.

But Hashem does answer prayers. Sometimes it is murky and unclear and sometimes it is a smack on the side of the head.

So that is how I ended up learning two hours a day at Yeshiva Gedola of Teaneck with my excellent chavrusas (study partners).

Being in kollel is not as odd as you think. While there is a generational difference, we recently had a grandchild, so I can talk strollers and pediatricians. Just not about diaper changing. I leave that to the next generation...

Lesson #3 – Think about your legacy.

I was on Wall Street for 25 years including 20 years at Bear Stearns. I had some great calls and made people a lot of money (and may have lost people a lot of money at times as well). I was on the Institutional Investor All-Star team for 16 years, the Wall Street Journal All-Star team for nine years.

But that is not what I will be remembered for from my years at Bear Stearns. The frum world remembers me for running the Bear Stearns minyan – thanks to an email from one of the participants.

Just a bit of history. When Bear Stearns was at 245 Park Avenue, there was a minyan in the stairwell – owing to its legacy as an Olympia & York building. That changed when we moved to a new building at 383 Madison. With tighter security, there was no common area for the minyan so we stopped meeting. A few months after disbanding, a summer intern from YU asked me if I could get a minyan going. In the new building I was able to get the conference room next to my office and we were off and running.

In fact, word got around and we started attracting outsiders from nearby firms. Then – after a few weeks – I got a call from Human Resources at Bear.

I heard you have a minyan at Bear, he said.

Sure, do you want to attend?

No, but there is a problem. There were issues around security with outsiders coming to a “secure” floor.

What can we do, I asked.

I left it in their hands and in Hashem’s hands.

It turns out that there is a law that requires a company to provide its employees with reasonable accommodation to prayer. So while the company did not want an official “Bear Stearns minyan,” they agreed to give me a room every day for prayer – for the “Andy Neff meeting” and to which I could invite some of my friends to enable me to have a minyan. Hence the minyan, where we regularly had 20-30 people and, on a fast day when we had a sefer Torah, we would have more than 100 people.

Here is the final irony. Bear Stearns is gone. But the minyan – which started at 245 Park -- lives on. Roughly one third of the attendees were from JP Morgan, which owned three buildings adjacent to our headquarters, so we simply transferred the management of the minyan over to JPMorgan. A perfect plan for how to make Bear Stearns go away without interfering with the ongoing minyan.

Lesson #4 – Every cost has a benefit and every benefit has a cost

Wall Street is a great place to have a career – especially from a financial standpoint. Moreover, there is the prestige associated with Wall Street and the power, etc. What’s wrong with that?

In Pirkei Avos, perek dalet, first mishnah, Ben Zoma asks: who is wise – the person who learns from everyone else. Who is strong – the person who controls himself. Who is rich? The person who is happy with what he has. Who is honored? The person who honors other people. What is it that ties all these comments together? What ties them together is that each of the middos – wisdom, strength, wealth, honor – can only come from you – no one else can really provide it for you because if you depend on others for these attributes, then they all go away when the external forces, the people go away.

There is a cost to being on Wall Street – and probably in other high-powered positions. You lose track of priorities. You live with such stress all the time that you don’t know what it is like not to have stress. The analogy I use is of a scuba diver who lives from oxygen tank to oxygen tank not realizing that all the oxygen in the world is available to him five feet above on the surface.

There is a gemara in Pesachim – and again in Bava Basra – that says Olam hafuch rai’si that in Olam Haba we see that the world to come is inverted from this world. That was a hard gemara for me to understand until I left the high-powered world. In that world, what you think is important loses its importance. The things I feared losing the most were the small things: a secretary, car services, etc. The thing I had given up most easily was time – time with family, quality and quantity time. And that I realize has the most value.

I’m not saying that effort is not required and that you shouldn’t devote time to your work – just that there are ways to do it without stress. And – much of it seems so unimportant in retrospect. And also, as we saw in the comments on Bnai Reuven and Bnai Gad, you need to keep your priorities straight.

Lesson #5 – Handling tests – it’s easier than you think.

At one level, I believe that I am fortunate to have this test at this stage in my life.

We learn that Hashem never gives us a test that we cannot handle. To me, conversely, that says that I was not ready to handle this test until now. I feel thankful that I have matured to a level that I can handle something like this.

Moreover, for many of us, our careers are our lives or close to it after our families. The loss of a career is devastating at many levels – some of which I have noted already. And financial turmoil is another nightmare.

But the positive for me is learning that I can deal with it. It’s a new reality, but I am ready for the next reality.

Many ask what is the key to a Jewish community. To some, it is the kosher pizza restaurant. To others, it is a lot of shuls. But what really makes the community whole is the Torah it propagates. Being able to bring Torah to the world is a valuable asset – and I am skilled at identifying undervalued assets.

Andrew Neff was a leading securities analyst on Wall Street including the last 20 years at Bear Stearns, recognized by Institutional Investor and the Wall Street Journal as an All-Star. He now learns in the Yeshiva Gedola of Teaneck in the morning.