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ON MASEI - 5774

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Israel has begun a ground offensive in Gaza. In contrast to the air raids and occasional naval strikes we have witnessed until now in Operation Protective Edge, ground offensives obviously pose an even greater danger to the soldiers bravely undertaking them. Please daven for the safety, success, and speedy return of every one of our soldiers, acheinu beit yisrael!

Below is an appropriate chapter to recite for the circumstances. Other appropriate chapters include chapters 6,13,20,22,23,30,32,38,41,51,86,88,91,102,103,130,142,143. These other Tehillim can be found at <http://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2601.htm>

<http://www.israelbehindthenews.com/bin/content.cgi?ID=7426&q=1>

Israel Resource Review

A from a soldier in Gaza letter:

Thu Jul 24, 2014 10:09 am (PDT). Posted by: "Yankee"

Today our hearts are pounding in fear. Who of us will die? And who will return safely?

We are your messengers in fighting. We are fighting so you can live peacefully with your children. So you can stay alive. We are your protection. Will you be ours? We are going to this dangerous mission knowing some of us will not come back, but will rise to their next position in a storm to heaven, as Eliyahu the Navi did.

We are going with devotion and dedication.

We are asking you to be our protection with your prayers. Protect us by going above and beyond yourselves through Ruchniyus (spirituality) and good deeds.

Pray for us. Pray that you won't see another mother burying her son. Pray that you won't see our wives as widows raise our children in tears. Pray that our children will grow up knowing who their fathers are. Pray that we will eliminate the terrorists who aim to destroy us, and that we will not injure innocent women and children.

Please, we are begging you, as you are reading this, don't just go on to the next thing you are doing. Say a chapter of Tehillim (psalms). Wake up David HaMelech (King David) to ask Hashem (God) for full Geulah (redemption) and peace for the world. Take upon yourselves another good deed. And please pass this on. I'm certain that your prayer will make a difference. Remember, we are in it together. We are on the front lines carrying the weapons and you are fighting along with us in your prayers. Each word of your prayer gives us strength, protection and success!!!!!!

from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Parsha - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Leadership at Time of Crisis

The parsha of Masei always occurs at the heart of the Three Weeks. This is the time when we engage in an act of collective recall of our two greatest defeats as a nation. The symbol of the nation was the Temple in Jerusalem. So the symbol of the nation's defeat was the destruction of the Temple. It happened twice, once in the sixth century BCE, the second time in the first century of the common era. In both cases it happened because of poor leadership.

The first defeat was set in motion some three centuries before it happened by a disastrous decision on the part of king Solomon's son Rehoboam. The people were restless during the latter part of Solomon's reign. They felt he has placed too heavy a burden on the people, particularly during the building of the Temple. When he died they came to his son and successor and asked him to lighten the load. His father's counsellors told him to accede to their request. They gave him one of the finest pieces of advice ever given to a leader. If you serve the people they will serve you (1 Kings 12:7). Rehoboam did not listen. The kingdom split. Defeat of both halves – the northern and southern kingdoms – was inevitable and only a matter of time. As Abraham Lincoln said: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The second defeat in the days of the Romans was the result of a complete collapse of leadership during the late Second Temple period. The Hasmonian kings, having defeated Hellenism, then succumbed to it. The priesthood became politicised and corrupt. Maimonides wrote, in his Letter to the Sages of Marseilles,[1] that the Second Temple fell because Jews had not learned military strategy and the laws of conquest. The Talmud says it fell because of gratuitous hatred. Josephus tells us it fell because of conflicts within the forces defending Jerusalem. All three explanations are true and part of the same phenomenon. When there is no effective leadership, divisions open up within the group. There is internal conflict, energy is wasted, and no coherent strategy emerges. Again defeat becomes inevitable. In Judaism, leadership is not a luxury but a necessity. Ours is a small and intensely vulnerable people. Inspired, we rise to greatness. Uninspired, we fall.

But there is, oddly enough, a deeply positive message about the three weeks. For the fact is that the Jewish people survived those defeats. They did not **merely** survive. They recovered and grew stronger. They became in the most positive sense a nation of survivors. Who gave them that strength and courage?

The answer is: three leaders whose names are indelibly associated with the three weeks: Moses, whose message to the generations at the beginning of Devarim is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha be'Av, Isaiah whose vision gives that day its name as Shabbat Chazon, and Jeremiah, the prophet who foresaw the destruction and whose words form the haftarat for two of the Three Weeks.

What made these men great leaders? They were all critical of their contemporaries – but then, so are most people. It takes no skill whatsoever to be a critic. All three predicted doom. But Jeremiah himself pointed out that

predicting doom is a no-risk option. If bad things happen, you are proved right. If they don't – well, clearly God decided to have compassion.[2] So what made Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah different? What made them great leaders? Specifically, what made them leaders in hard times, and thus leaders for all time? Three things set them apart.

The first is that they were all **prophets of hope**. Even in their darkest moments they were able to see through the clouds of disaster to the clear sky beyond. They were not optimists. There is a difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that things will **get** better. Hope is the belief that if we work hard enough together we can **make** things better. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it needs courage, wisdom, a deep understanding of history and possibility, and the ability to communicate, to be a prophet of hope. That is what Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah all were. Here is Moses:

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, **then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.** Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. (Deut. 30: 1-4)

Here is Isaiah:

I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.” (Isaiah 1: 26)

And this is Jeremiah:

This is what the Lord says: “Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,” says the Lord. “They will return from the land of the enemy. **There is hope for your descendants,**” says the Lord. “Your children will return to their land.” (Jer. 31: 15-16)

The point about all three of these prophecies is that they were delivered knowing that bad things were about to happen to the Jewish people. They are not easy hope; they express hope rescued from the valley of despair.

The second characteristic that made Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah different was that they delivered their criticism in love. Isaiah said in the name of God perhaps the loveliest words ever spoken to the Jewish people: “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed” (Isaiah 54: 10). Jeremiah, in the midst of his critique of the nation, said in the name of God, “I remember the kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me through the wilderness, through a land not sown” (Jer. 2: 2). Moses' love for the people was evident in every prayer he said on their behalf, especially after they had made the golden calf. On that occasion he said to God: “Now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Ex. 32:). He was prepared to give his life for his people. It is easy to be a critic, but the only effective critics are those who truly love – and **show** they love – those whom they criticize.

Third, Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were the three prophets who, more than any others, spoke about the role of Jews and Israel in the context of humanity as a whole. Moses said, Keep the commands “for they are **your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations**” (Deut. 4: 6).

Isaiah said in God's name: “You are my witnesses ... that I am God.” (Isaiah 43: 12), and “I created you and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations, opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (42: 6-7).

Jeremiah was the leader who defined for all time the role of Jews in the Diaspora: “Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its prosperity you shall prosper” (Jeremiah 29: 7) – the first statement in history of what it is to be a creative minority.

Why did this universal perspective matter? Because those who care only for their own people are chauvinists. They create false expectations, narrow and self-regarding emotions, and bravado rather than real courage.

Moses had to show (as he did when he rescued Jethro's daughters from the local shepherds, Ex. 2: 17) that he cared for non-Israelites as well as Israelites. Jeremiah was told by God to become a “prophet to the nations,” not just to Israel (Jer. 1: 5). Isaiah in one of the most remarkable prophecies of all time showed as much concern for Egypt and Assyria, Israel's enemies, as for Israel itself (Is. 19: 19-25).

Great leaders are great not just because they care for their own people – everyone except a self-hater does that – but because they care for humanity. That is what gives their devotion to their own people its dignity and moral strength.

To be an agent of hope, to love the people you lead, and to widen their horizons to embrace humanity as a whole – that is the kind of leadership that gives people the ability to recover from crisis and move on. It is what made Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah three of the greatest leaders of all time.

[1] English translation available in Isidore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, Behrman House, 1976, 463ff.

[2] See Jeremiah 28; Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 10: 4.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Cherishing the Spiritual Embrace of Eretz Yisroel TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> Thu, Jul 19, 2012 at 10:02 PM To: weeklydt@torahweb2.org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

Cherishing the Spiritual Embrace of Eretz Yisroel

This week as we close out the sefer of Bamidbar we revisit the episode of the "wise five" sisters, who in a seemingly brazen fashion confronted Moshe Rabbeinu to claim a piece of the land of Israel for their family. Last week, in parshas Pinchas we read that due to their bold initiative, their father and family would not be left out, simply because he died young with no sons to claim his heritage. Not only did the wise five intuit G-d's rulings but they were accorded the rare merit of bringing an entire parshainto the written Torah! In what seems to be an after thought or a delayed reaction at best, recorded in this week's parshas Massei, the tribe to which Tzefchad belonged, the tribe of Binyamin, point out that the wise five could marry members of other tribes and thus dilute the ancestral heritage of Binyamin. Won't this ultimately compromise the integrity of the tribal properties that Moshe delineated earlier? Here too, due to their inquiry, halachos are announced that will protect Binyamin and the entire system that shevetBinyamin intended to guard. Similar to the wise and righteous women, their concern was upheld by halacha and that very response became a part of the written law. Even the language of Moshe rings the same as he communicates to both groups: "kein bnos tzlofchod dovro" and "kein mateh benei Yosef dovrin". Yet Rashi does not quote any rabbinic response praising the men for their love of the land, nor for their concern of their own ancestral legacy and that of all the other shevatim as well. Apparently the men of the Binyamin tribe are good administrators, excellent business men and very concerned leaders. On the other hand the daughters of Tzefchad are "mechavivei ha'aretz", those who cherish the Land of Israel. Moreover, it is through their actions that Chazal derive that their shevet of Menashe were also "mechavivei ha'aretz"; that the shevet maintained this legacy of their ancestor Yosef who requested to be buried in Israel at enormous risk to the family's relationship with the Egyptians. Furthermore, Chazal see that the efforts of these women instruct us that all of the women of the dor hamidbar were all "mechavivei ha'aretz." What gesture or expression convinces

Chazal that these women were indeed righteously pursuing their commitment to our land rather than seeking financial stability and enhancement? To be sure this question has puzzled many and forced one of our leading contemporary sages, Rav Aryeh Leib Shteiman to conclude, after his careful study of the text turned fruitless, that the rabbis must have had some oral tradition on which they based their very generous estimate of the sisters' motives. Here are two answers that I shared with my kehilla last week as we studied parshas Pinchas. Both are supported by this week's reading and both deserve careful reflection as we prepare ourselves for the days ahead.

Harav Moshe Shternbuch (Ta'am Voda'as) understands that only those who felt that entering the land was imminent would be so moved to seek their place in it that they would storm the doors of Moshe Rabbeinu's bais hamedrash. That sense of imminence, that deeply heartfelt tug, is born from a heartsick love that cannot find peace away from its cherished holy land. We have no record of the men even inquiring as to fairness of a distribution that will somehow find parity between plots on the Mediterranean, a barren desert hilltop, a spot near the yam hamelech spas, the flat Yarden areas, and the impressive mountains of the north. We have no indication that any shevet argued for any particular area that may have well suited their exclusive needs and talents until the Reuvenites and Gadites were actually standing on top of the area that enticed them. It was only when their entry was around the corner that shevet Binyamin raised their resentment at what may compromise their property. We are certainly in no place to judge but are surely placed to introspect. We have witnessed events of redemption like no other generation in almost two thousand years. We can repeat the litany in our sleep: the return of our people to our land, re-establishing our self governance, the ingathering of far flung Jews, and the flourishing of Torah study in Israel. And yet how many of us dream of our place and where it will be and what it will look like? How different were the bnos Tzlefachad! Upon hearing the laws of inheritance, they did not rest until they had an audience with Moshe Rabbeinu and Eliezer kohen gadol. Their arguments showed that they must have burned the midnight oil to organize a powerful and impressive argument to the supreme sages of the time. Rav Shternbach argues that only an unfulfilled longing coupled with the deep seated belief that their redemptive moment is about to happen could create the palpable passion experienced by Tzlefachad's daughters. Now please listen to the insight of another contemporary Yerushalmi sage. Harav Nebentzal, the rov of the old city, observed (in Yerushalayim Be'moadeho) that the daughters of Tzlefachad asked for an "achuza". Rav Nebentzal explains that this indicates a deeper appreciation of the land of Israel. There are many who come to appreciate the varied and magnificent landscapes of the land; many will enjoy the diverse and tasty fruits that make other fruits taste bland; still others will relish the moderate climates of Israel. But Hashem calls our attention to the closeness that He has with the land, the dynamic relationship that His constant attention to it creates (Devarim 11:12). The Jew in Israel during the good times when the rains come and are helpful can correctly take strength from the warm embrace of the Almighty. If at times they are forced to feel distance, they can appropriately conclude that they are being called upon. Apparently the benos Tzlefachad, more than others, appreciated this and thus they sought their father's "achuza". I find this a very compelling insight in light of the context of the narrative. The women are responding to Moshe's description of the upcoming allocation of the land. In that instruction Moshe repeatedly refers to the manner in which the land of Israel will be divided. He refers to Israel and the upcoming process of allocation exclusively as a "nachala" or as an "apportionment". In the course of four verses, "nachala" appears six times and a form of "chaluka" is mentioned. Indeed the Binyaminites in parshas Massei refer to the land similarly, almost exclusively as a "nachala". In the course of twelve pesukim the land is mentioned seventeen times, but not once as an "achuza". Yet the daughters of Tzlefachad refer to their place in Israel only as an "achuza", clearly making some statement when they were in fact asking for a place in the land to be bequeathed to their tribe.

Referring to one's right to Israel as an "achuza" takes us back to its first usage as such, to the moment when the land was promised to Avrohom and to all of us. That covenant established Israel as our eternal "achuza" that can uniquely bind us to Hashem, where we can revel in His closeness (see Breishis 17:7-8). Thus Chazal understood that these wise and righteous five women, more than their counterparts, cherished Israel not for its external beauty which is rich and Divinely blessed, but for the "achuza", the spiritual embrace that can only happen there. As we ponder the loss of the holy intimacy of our land and mourn for it, may we speedily bring its return and merit to participate in the joy of her renewal.

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Tue, Jul 22, 2014 at 7:05 PM

subject: Rabbi Frand on Fighting a War

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - On Fighting a War

Dear Friends, We announced together with last week's weekly thought on the Parsha that it would be our last offering until we resume for Parshas Shoftim. However, in light of the situation in Eretz Yisroel, I felt compelled to send out one more dvar Torah for two reasons: 1. To present some Hashkafas HaTorah in viewing the current war and what ultimately brings success. 2. Additionally, I hope that people will study this piece as a zchus for the brave soldiers who are putting their lives on the line to protect Klal Yisroel in Eretz Yisroel and as a zchus that they should all return safe and sound to their families who are also moser nefesh as well on behalf of Klal Yisroel. Let us all be zoche to hear besuroso tovov ye'shuos ve'nechamos. Yissocher Frand

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi YissocherFrands' Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 822 – Making Chanukas HaBayis For A New Home. Good Shabbos! *The Special Role of the Kohen Who Reminds Us of the Source of Success at War*

Before the Jewish people go out to war, a specially designated Kohen addresses the nation. He tells them "Hear O' Israel. You are going out today to do battle. You should not be afraid because the Almighty One will help you..." [Devorim 20:3] The Kohen who made this speech was known as the Priest Anointed for War (Kohen Mashuach Milchama). A Kohen was specifically anointed with the sacred anointing oil to have this job and to deliver this charge to the people before they went out to battle. In several ways, the Kohen Mashuach Milchama is similar to the Kohen Gadol [the High Priest]. Unlike a regular Kohen, but in common with the Kohen Gadol, he is forbidden to marry a widow but must marry a virgin. Likewise he is given the privilege (in common with the High Priest) to pose questions to the Urim v'Tumim. In fact although there was an office called the segan [vice] Kohen Gadol, the Rambam writes [in Hilchos Klei HaMikdash 4:19] that the Kohen anointed for war outranked the segan Kohen Gadol. It seems strange that the only known duty of the Kohen Mashuach Milchama was to address the people before they went out to battle. A person could perform such a job without working a single day his whole life! Wars are not an everyday occurrence. One can go years or decades without needing to make such a speech. It is conceivable that despite his exalted position such a Kohen never had to carry out the duties of his office.

This anomaly leads us to a simple question: Why not assign this job to the Kohen Gadol himself? Why create a new job title? Why not let the Kohen Gadol, or if not him the segan Kohen Gadol, perform this job if, and when, it becomes necessary to go to war?

Let us point out something else. The Rambam writes [in Hilchos Melachim 1:7] (regarding a son inheriting the throne from his father the king) "And not only regarding monarchy alone but all position of authority and all appointments in Israel are passed down through inheritance to one's son and

one's grandson forever, providing the son is a worthy successor to his father in wisdom and in Fear (of Heaven)". However, the Rambam writes [in Hilchos Klei HaMikdash 4:21] that the position of Mashuach Milchama is an exception to the rule. This job does not pass on through inheritance to one's son, but rather the son of a Kohen Anointed for War is just a regular Kohen. Why does this exception exist?

Let us raise a third difficulty: The pasuk [verse] introducing the job of the Mashuach Milchama states: "And it will be when you draw near to battle the Kohen will approach (v'nigash haKohen) and speak to the people." [Devorim 20:2]. The two words v'nigash haKohen seem superfluous. What do they add? Obviously, the Kohen will not be standing a mile away when he gives the charge to the people. It is understood that he must approach the people before he begins to speak. In addition, usually the verb "hagasha" in Tanach connotes prayer. The Medrash says regarding on the words "VaYigash eilav Yehudah" [Bereshis 44:18] that Yehudah approached Yosef with a prayer. Similarly, when the pasuk says, "Vayigash Eliyahu" [Melachim I 18:36] the prophet Elijah offered a prayer. Likewise, the words here "v'nigash haKohen" seem to imply that the Kohen Mashuach Milchama uttered some kind of prayer. The Torah does not tell us what prayer he uttered. What was it?

Finally, the Torah instructs that anyone who was afraid to go to battle was to return home [Devorim 20:8]. The Talmud states [Sotah 44b] that in addition to the simple interpretation of excluding someone who was actually afraid of doing battle on the battle field, this pasuk refers to someone who was afraid of aveiros [sins] he committed, which might make him undeserving of being saved in a time of danger. The Gemara says this would even include someone who merely violated the prohibition of talking between the time he put on his hand Tefillin and the time he put on his head Tefillin. Why, we ask, did the Talmud cite this specific example of a "small aveira"?

To answer all four questions, I would like to quote a very interesting approach from Rav Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg, the Tolner Rebbe, in his Sefer Heimah Yenachamuni. Rav Weinberg suggests that fighting a war presents a person with a very difficult spiritual test. A person needs to go to battle with weapons and with military strategy. A person needs to use the latest technology and to fight the battle the ways battles are fought -- with soldiers, arms, battle plans, etc. We have a strong perception and gut feeling that an army is victorious because of military prowess.

Viewing the matter from a spiritual point of view, we all know that this is not true. We know that the outcome of a battle is determined "Not with valor and not with strength but with My Spirit, says the L-rd of Hosts" [Zecharia 4:6]. We know that to think it is our military might that made us successful is heresy. It is falling into the trap of "My strength and the power of my hand made for me all this valor." [Devorim 8:17]

Those of us who remember the Six Day War in 1967 remember how the entire world was talking about the brilliant strategy of the Israeli army which defeated armies of tens of millions of Arabs. They decimated the forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in less than a week's time. There was a pervasive feeling of "we are so much smarter than them", "we are so much braver than them", "we are so much more technologically advanced than them". The attitude was indeed "My strength and the power of my hand made for me all this valor." This is a "treife hashkafa" – an improper, mistaken philosophy. Certainly, we cannot rely on miracles, but we must always keep in the forefront of our minds that "It is He who gives us the strength to have valor" [Devorim 8:18].

How can people avoid the trap? How can those who have to fight that battle and be out there in the foxhole and who are so apt to fall into the trap of "my strength and the power of my hands..." avoid the trap? What can prevent them from making this tragic mistake?

Prevention of this mistaken attitude was the job of the Kohen Mashuach Milchama. The Kohen Mashuach Milchama prevented them from adopting this "treife hashkafa" by telling them "Hear O Israel you are drawing near today towards a war with your enemy. Do not let your hearts become soft; do

not fear nor be alarmed; do not be frightened of them..." That was his message. We may have the arms and we may have the most brilliant generals and the best strategy but we must know that in the final analysis it is the Master of the Universe who will help us win this war.

That was his job and that is why it says "v'nigash haKoehn v'Diber el ha'Am" [the Priest drew near to speak to the nation]. This was not just a speech to the people. It was also a prayer to G-d. "Please, G-d, do not let my people fall prey to this foreign philosophy of 'the strength of my arms makes this valor for me'".

That is why the Kohen Gadol was not given this job. The Kohen Gadol spends his entire day and his entire life in the Beit HaMikdash. He is a person who is entirely spiritual. This job description does not require a holy person. It requires a person who knows the temptations of what it is to be out there in the "real world" and to deal with these feelings of "it is my strength which accomplished all this". This job requires a unique special person. That is why the Kohen Mashuach Milchama's son does not automatically inherit the position. The position requires rare talents. Every generation needs a new Kohen Mashuach Milchama.

That is also the reason why the Talmud cites a person who spoke between putting on the hand Tefillin and the head Tefillin as the example of one who returns home from battle due to being afraid of his aveiros. The Tefillin shel Yad [Hand Tefilin] represent the attitude of "the strength of my hand". It is the head, the brain, which has to rein in such a philosophy of life. The Head has to rule over the Hand. One who pauses between donning the hand Tefillin and the head Tefillin believes that there can be a separation between the two. He believes there can be a time when the philosophy of the Hand rules by itself without being reined in by the philosophy of the Head. Such a person indeed must retreat from the battlefield.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com>

date: Thu, Jul 24, 2014 at 9:48 AM

subject: Open Letter to Israel's Critics; No More Apologies; Messiah, Where Are You? - July 24, 2014

10 Reasons Why We Need the Messiah Right Now

With outrageous levels of insanity overtaking the world, we need him now more than ever.

by **Rabbi Nechemia Coopersmith**

Who needs the messiah? you may be wondering. Isn't that a Christian concept?

The notion of the messiah is as Jewish as Shabbat, the Shema and chicken soup.

Who is the messiah? He will be a great leader, pious and wise, who will become the next Jewish king. He will oversee the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, the Temple in Jerusalem, gather all the Jews to their homeland, Israel, and most importantly usher in a new era of world peace and spiritual awakening when the entire world will recognize the truth of God and Torah; "The earth will be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). (Click here for more elaboration and sources.)

With outrageous levels of insanity overtaking the world, we need him now more than ever. Here are my 10 reasons why:

1. Many innocent people have been killed and the pain is palpable. Sean Carmeli, a lone soldier from Texas who spent a couple of months studying at Aish HaTorah was killed in Gaza. 30 other soldiers have been killed, and the family of Oron Shaul is now experiencing the horror of their 21 year old son missing in action. And many Arab civilians who do not want to annihilate Israel are being killed because their perverse government values the death of Israelis over the lives of Gazans.

2. Israel is being blamed by many for the deaths of Arab civilians in Gaza, despite doing more than any country in the history of modern warfare to

limit civilian casualties. The IDF warns them to evacuate before striking – through leaflets, phone calls, and prior ‘knock on the roof’ projectiles, and is risking the lives of their own soldiers in a dangerous ground operation in order to launch pinpointed strikes against tunnels and Hamas terrorist infrastructure.

Only Hamas is to blame for the tragedy of civilian deaths.* They use human shields and embed rocket launchers in schools and mosques. Instead of building a flourishing economy they have diverted tens of millions of dollars to create a militarized state with a complete subterranean world stockpiled with weapons. As Prime Minister Netanyahu said, “Here’s the difference between us. We’re using missile defense to protect our civilians and they’re using their civilians to protect their missiles.”

3. It is madness that 80% of the Israeli population, yours truly included, is living under the constant threat rocket attacks from Hamas. Where else in the world does this happen?

4. On two accounts Hamas rockets are discovered in UNRWA schools in Gaza. Instead of using these schools to educate children, they’re being used as hideouts for weapons designated to kill children in Israel. Even more infuriating, is that UNRWA actually returned the rockets to Hamas, aiding their murderous goal, instead of handing them to Israel.

5. Alison Benedikt, an editor at Slate, writes a galling piece apportioning partial blame to Birthright for the death of Max Steinberg, an Israeli soldier from California who made Aliyah a few months after his Birthright trip. Benedikt simply cannot fathom why anyone in his right mind would choose to live in Israel and risk his life fighting for the country, and has the chutzpah to assume he was either “a lost soul” or duped by some Birthright brainwashing machine. This drivel was published even before Max’s parents buried him in Jerusalem. (30,000 people came to his funeral; apparently there are some Jews who appreciate a Jew’s connection to his homeland and the heroism in giving up one’s life defending the Jewish People.)

6. The world is erupting with anti-Semitic rallies, violent protests and die-ins, that are reminiscent of Europe right before the Holocaust. Chants of “death to the Jews” can be heard at anti-Israel demonstrations in France, Germany, Spain, Turkey, Belgium, Holland. Jews are being physically attacked, and not only in Europe. In Calgary, Arabs attacked participants at a pro-Israel rally and the police did not intervene.

7. While the media is filled with enormous – and violent – anti-Israel rallies, the big pro-Israel rally in London only mustered 1500 people, less than 1% of the London Jewish community. Where are the Jews? Too afraid to come? Not interested? At summer camp? And where are all the Israel Solidarity missions? And now the FAA embargo is in place, further rewarding terror and leaving Israel stranded.

8. Where is the moral outrage at Syria where more than 700 Arabs were killed just this past week, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights? Where are the protests over the 50,000 civilians who have been slaughtered in Syria the past three years?

9. Israel has yet to find and bring to justice Amer Abu Aysha and Marwan Kawasme, the two Hamas operatives suspected of killing Naftali Frankel, Gilad Shaer and Eyal Yifrach.

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10. Despite all the efforts in Jewish outreach, we are losing the battle against assimilation. As the recent Pew study confirmed the obvious, things are getting worse, not better. We can hardly raise the issue of intermarriage and assimilation today without offending the Jews we most want to engage.

While there are bright spots of innovation and effective outreach, at this rate we are on the precipice of losing a generation of unaffiliated Jews.

Tisha B’Av is around the corner. This is the time to feel the pain of the Jewish people in exile, and to channel it towards yearning for a new era when “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah, 2:4).

* The numbers of civilian deaths need to be confirmed. Al Jazeera published a list of Gazans who died since Israel’s Operation Protective Edge began two weeks ago, based on data provided by Ashraf al-Qedra, a spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry. A breakdown by age and gender published on the Israellycool blog confirmed CAMERA’s similar analysis that 82% of the dead were men, and 66 per cent between 18 and 38 (combatant age).

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Imperfect Democracy

Winston Churchill once famously said that “democracy is a terrible system of government but it is better than any other system.” The irony of that statement has been borne out by the past events of this last century and by current events.

It is true that Hitler ruled as a megalomaniac dictator. However, his rise to power was by democratic means and through electoral success. Once in power, he naturally did away with the nuisance of elections. But if it were not for the Nazi party’s success in the German elections in the years immediately preceding his ascension to becoming the Chancellor of Germany, he never would have been able to achieve that office.

We are currently witness to the imperfections and failures of the democratic process as they affect the Middle East. Iraq’s democratically elected government is apparently so corrupt and powerless that the country itself is literally falling apart in civil strife and ethnic conflict. Syria’s sham elections have given Assad a third term as president and the right to preside over a civil war that has already taken the lives of approximately one-hundred-fifty thousand Syrians and sent millions of others into what will undoubtedly be permanent exile and refugee status.

Three years ago Egypt democratically elected the Moslem Brotherhood to lead its country. Only the interference of its military, which overthrew that democratically elected government, somehow stabilized the country and prevented further catastrophe in the area. And lest we forget, Hamas was democratically elected to govern by the people of the Gaza Strip.

Once in power, again like Hitler’s Germany, no new elections have ever been held in Gaza. Nevertheless, Hamas came to power in a legitimate democratic election. Would that that electoral result could somehow have been reversed!

For almost eighty years, Turkey was governed by an autocratic, secular, military government devoted to bringing Turkey into the Western world and minimizing the insidious influence of militant Islamists. All forms of public display of religion were forbidden and Turkey became a member of NATO and was deemed a westernized country.

During this time, Turkey, an overwhelmingly Moslem country, maintained excellent relations – diplomatic, military and economic - with the State of Israel and world Jewry generally. All of this changed within the last decade when the military abdicated its ruling role in favor of more democratic rule and allowed elections for the leadership of the country to take place. In those elections, the Islamist parties came to power and leader of the country became Erdogan. There is no longer any doubt that he is an inveterate anti-Semite and he has reversed Turkey’s long-standing relationship with Israel. His statements regarding Israel border on the hysterical.

He has involved Turkey in the Syrian civil war and is fighting his own civil war with the Kurdish minority of his country. He is certainly leading Turkey down a path of loss of regional influence in the Middle East, diplomatic isolation and economic ruin. Yet, again, he was democratically elected and

claims that he has a mandate for all his evil and unwise domestic and foreign policies.

Turkey has now aligned itself fully and almost fanatically with Hamas and is the source of relentless anti-Israel agitation in the Moslem and European world, even outdoing Iran in virulence and vitriol. It seems that the establishment of Turkish democracy has brought ruin to all concerned. That is a most sobering thought.

This is not a plea for the restoration of autocracy, absolute monarchy or any other form of authoritarian rule. It merely points out the dangers and imperfections that are part and parcel of democratic rule. It may very well be that, God willing soon, after the current Gaza war ends and the physical and emotional wreckage that Hamas has brought upon so many millions of people is tallied and recognized, it would nevertheless win an election in Gaza.

The wisdom of the masses is always questionable and unreliable. Yet, who is wise enough to know what is the best form of rule for those who live in Gaza? Israeli military government is certainly not an attractive option or solution. Abbas and his feckless Palestinian Authority would undoubtedly prove to be unpopular, corrupt and inefficient.

The British mandate is never going to be restored and UN peacekeepers have proven to be anything but keepers of the peace. So, now what? We live in an age where there are no simple or logical answers to any of the vexing issues that assail us from all directions. We should be very wary in confidently predicting that democracy and/or any other form of rule will somehow ameliorate the situation here in the Middle East. Democracy has worked wonders for the State of Israel. It has not done so well for any of our neighbors. Only time will tell how this drama will finally work itself out. Shabat shalom

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Maasei

There is a trend amongst all biblical commentators in the Jewish world to view the biblical description of past events that occurred to our ancestors from the time of Abraham through the beginning of Second Temple times as being not only a description of past events but to also subtly indicate the course of all events that would befall the Jewish people.

This type of idea perhaps helps us to understand why the Torah goes into such detail in the naming all of the way stops of the Jewish people during their forty-year sojourn in the Sinai Desert. The Torah indicates to us that the Jewish people were and are a wandering and traveling group.

Even though the commentators point out to us that the Lord favored Israel by allowing it to remain in place at one oasis for thirty-eight years and that all of the many other way station stops listed in this week's Torah reading took place only over a relatively short period of time, of approximately two years, the list of stops and starts is impressive if not even astounding.

Since most of these locations are unknown to us today and have limited meaning to later generations, the broader message encompassed in this travelogue is to be considered and studied. All of the commentators to the Bible have advanced insights and explanations to enlighten us as to the reasons for this detailed accounting of the travels of Israel in the desert of Sinai.

Rashi sees it as a type of recollected history of the events, failings and triumphs of the Jewish people on the road from Egyptian slavery to the settling of the Land of Israel. The Torah, in its usual cryptic style, only records the names of the places and we are to fill in the missing event that should be part of our memory bank. But that requires a certain amount of knowledge, sophistication and national memory. These items are always in short supply in every generation.

If one views Jewish history as a whole, then one realizes that this pattern of movement, stops and starts, continuing travel and social instability recorded for is in this week's Torah reading, is really an ongoing pattern in all of Jewish history. The Jewish people, again as a whole or in its many subdivisions, have literally seen the entire world in their wanderings. Already in First Temple times the prophet describes Jewish mercantile activity in faraway places of the ancient world. In the long exile and in the far-flung diaspora of the Jews, there is no place on our globe that has not seen Jewish settlement or activity.

Many commentators saw this phenomenon as a positive thing – the spreading the ideas of monotheism and of Torah values to a pagan and uncaring world. Others have seen it as the source of the angst and punishment of Israel for its betrayal of those very same values and beliefs. Perhaps both approaches are correct and have meaning for us.

Nevertheless, we now live in a shrinking Jewish world. Entire ancient Jewish communities no longer exist and the Jewish people are concentrated in a relatively small number of national enclaves, basically in the Western world and the Land of Israel. One would hope that both our travels and travails will soon come to an end.

Shabat shalom

http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column Masei: Zionism

There must be at least a thousand jokes that begin, "A Catholic priest, an Orthodox rabbi, and a Protestant minister enter a bar..." I'll begin this week's column with a story about a Catholic priest, an Orthodox rabbi, and a fine Jewish layman. They won't be entering a bar together, that's for sure. They won't even be sitting face-to-face. But they will all be expressing their opinion about a very important, and unfortunately very controversial, concept: Zionism.

I made the acquaintance of the Catholic priest many years ago, before he became a prominent bishop. We had a conversation recently in which he asked me to explain to him how certain very Orthodox Jews can espouse a doctrine of anti-Zionism. "After all," he said, "if they believe in the Hebrew prophets and believe that their prophecies are to be understood literally, how can they possibly be against Zionism? Almost all the prophets speak of the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and see the repossession of the Land of Israel by the Jewish people as the highest ideal."

For my friend the bishop, supporting the sovereign Jewish government in the Land of Israel is an imperative of the Jewish religion. I found it very difficult to explain to him the reasons why some devout Jews do not even recognize the modern-day State of Israel.

Not long after this conversation with my Roman Catholic friend, I ran into another friend, whom I first met many years ago. He is a follower of a Hasidic sect that is antagonistic to the Jewish State and which frequently publicly protests Israel's political and even military actions. He is a great scholar, and we have long ago learned to avoid discussing the topic of Zionism. He knows that my opinions are very different from his. Instead, we confine our conversations to his recent writings, which ironically are based upon the commentary on the Bible by Rabbi Moses Ben Nachman—Ramban, or Nachmanides.

During this recent encounter, we again avoided discussing the topic of Zionism. I know his position well. He believes that it is absolutely wrong for Jews nowadays to reclaim the Land of Israel, but that we must wait for the coming of the Messiah to do so. He sees the current State of Israel as being the audacious embodiment of sinful hubris. He believes that the State of Israel is nothing less than the work of the devil himself. My own view is quite different, and we have long both been reconciled to the fact that we would never convince the other to change his opinion.

The third "player" in my little story is, sadly, long deceased. He was a gentleman back in the community where I was a pulpit rabbi. He described himself as a religious Zionist and, indeed, was very active in leadership capacities within organizations that were ardently Zionist. Yet, when his own children informed him that they were making aliyah and moving to Israel, he was very upset and shared his disappointment with me.

My connections with these three individuals often motivate me to return to sources in our sacred tradition to buttress my own point of view. One such source is this week's Torah portion, Parshat Masei (Numbers 33:1-36:13). For me, this parsha is the basic

enunciation of what some call "Religious Zionism." In it, we read of the many, many wanderings of the Jewish people before they were privileged to possess the Land of Israel. We read of the commandment to conquer the land, to settle it, and to preserve it as an inheritance for our descendants. We learn in detail about the boundaries of the land and about the requirement of all Jews to assist in the process of its conquest. Is this all not what the world has come to refer to as "Zionism?"

Ramban, second only to Rashi as the most widely studied Jewish commentary on the Bible, remarks that in this week's Torah portion, we find one of the 613 commandments, namely the mitzvah to possess the Land of Israel. He furthermore insists that this positive commandment applies throughout Jewish history, even today, and is not just of historical interest.

The biblical verse reads, "And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned this land to you to possess" (Numbers 33:53), upon which Ramban comments, "In my opinion, this is a positive commandment, a mitzvah asheh. God is telling us to dwell in the land and to possess it, and not to reject it in any way, nor to substitute any other geographical dwelling place for it. Based upon this verse are the numerous eloquent remarks of our Sages on the importance of dwelling in the Land of Israel and never leaving—to the extent that a husband can force his wife, and a wife her husband, to dwell in the Land of Israel rather than elsewhere."

In another of his writings (Hasagot L'Sefer Hamitzvot, Mitzvah 4), in which he enumerates the 613 commandments, Ramban emphasizes that this verse is to be understood as a command, and not merely as a Divine promise that one day we shall dwell there.

Ramban echoes this attitude toward the Land of Israel, and its central role in our religion, throughout his vast writings. Furthermore, he personally practiced what he preached and left his native Spain to live in the Land of Israel, and indeed to die there. For me, Ramban is but one proponent of the religious imperative which underlies the modern State of Israel. Here are the words of a much more recent proponent of this position:

"The Land of Israel is not something external, not an external national asset, the means to the end of collective solidarity and the strengthening of the nation's existence...The Land of Israel is an essential unit bound by the bond of life to the people...The expectation of salvation is the force that preserves exilic Judaism; the Judaism of the Land of Israel is salvation itself."

These are words with which Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook opens his classic work, *Orot*. I write this column as the State of Israel and its inhabitants face a most difficult challenge, the onslaught of rockets aimed at them by a hostile enemy. At this moment, perhaps more than ever before, we draw our strength and our hope from the knowledge that it is the Divine will that we dwell in His land, and that we serve Him by defending it. With His assistance, we will succeed, and the land will continue to prosper materially and to flourish spiritually to an even greater extent than ever before.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Masei

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Torah.org

Kinder and Gentler Killers

This week we read about the cities of refuge. A man who kills someone accidentally is exiled to an Ir Miklat, a city of refuge. In addition to killers, a very distinguished group of people, the Levites, lived in those cities. Their job was something similar to today's Rabbis. They traveled throughout Israel, teaching and preaching. The Levites would return to their homes and neighbors, people who killed through carelessness, who were convianslaughter of sorts. They played an integral role in the killer's rehabilitation.

The sentence imposed on the killers was also very unique. It was not defined by time, but rather by circumstance. The killers would go free only when the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would die. The Talmud in Makos tells us that the Kohen Gadol's family members were quite worried. They were not concerned that there would be an assassination plot against the Kohen Gadol's life. They were worried that the convicts would pray that the Kohen Gadol would die before his due time, thus releasing them early. In order to dissuade them, the mother of the Kohen Gadol would distribute food and clothing to the inmates to deter them from praying that her son die.

It is hard to understand. Are there no loved ones waiting for these outcasts with food and clothing to be offered upon release? Were the Kohen Gadol's mom's cookies worth exile in the city of refuge? How did these gifts work as bribes?

Reb Aryeh Levine took it upon himself to visit Jewish inmates, mostly members of the Irgun, held under British rule prior to Israel's statehood. He became like a father to those prisoners, bringing them food, clothes and love. For years, despite sweltering heat and frigid rains, he never missed a Shabbos visit, save one.

Once, in the midst of a Shabbos service, a very excited messenger called him out of the prison. Reb Aryeh's daughter had become paralyzed and the doctors were helpless. He was needed for support at home, immediately. After the Shabbos, an Arab messenger was sent by the concerned inmates to inquire what tragedy interrupted the weekly visit. The next Shabbos, despite the enduring tragedy at home, the Rabbi went to the prison as usual. Normally during the Torah reading, prisoners would pledge a few coins to charity. This week the donations were far different.

"I will give up a week of my life for the sake of Reb Aryeh's daughter," the first convict pledged. Another prisoner announced that he would give a month from his. Each one called to the Torah upped the previous pledge until the last prisoner cried out, "what is our life compared to Reb Aryeh's anguish? I will give all my remaining days for the sake of the Rabbi's daughter."

At this unbelievable display of love and affection, Reb Aryeh broke down and wept. Miraculous as it may sound, that Saturday night Reb Aryeh's daughter began to move and within days was fully recovered.

The cities of refuge were not jails, nor were they mere detention camps. They were environments in which reckless people became aware that careless actions have serious ramifications. They were constantly under the influence of their neighbors, the Levites. They would observe them pray, learn, and teach others. They would see the epitome of awareness and care for fellow beings.

The mission of the Kohen Gadol's mother was not just to distribute food. It was to develop a bond with those people whose carelessness spurred a death. They saw the love a parent had for her son as she subconsciously plead with the inmates to spare her child. They saw how a total stranger, despite her great esteem, would make sure that their needs in the city of refuge were cared for. They may have even thought of the loved one they killed and his family.

After developing an awareness of life, they would never be able to pray for the death of anyone, even if it meant their own freedom. In fact, they, like Reb Aryeh's prisoners, may have offered their years for the merit of the Kohen Gadol.

The Torah can not punish without teaching and rehabilitating. It infuses a love for life and spirituality into former careless killers. Its goal is to mold a new person whose attitudes will cause him to be kinder, gentler, and a lot more careful.

The story was adapted from *A Tzadik in Our Time*, by Simcha Raz, (c) 1976 Feldheim Publishers.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

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subject: Rabbi Mayer Twersky - A Three Thousand Year War (A Special Dvar Torah regarding the War in Israel -ed.)

The TorahWeb Foundation

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

Last week's essay (Naftali, Gilad, Eyal Hy"d and the War on Hamas: Reflections on Kiddush and Chillul Hashem, Providence, and Prayer) and this week's expanded dvar Torah are intended to provide perspective on what's happening in Israel and also to result in increased talmud Torah as a zechus for acheinu Bnei Yisroel in Eretz Yisroel. Please share them both with others who might appreciate them, and thereby you too can help maximize the harbotzas haTorah and zechus to protect Bnei Yisroel in general, and the chayalim of Tzahal in particular.-Editor

A Three Thousand Year War

I

Introduction

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, leader of Torah Jewry between the two World Wars, published his first volume of responsa in 1922. At that time in the aftermath of the destruction of the Great War and with assimilation rampant, Jewry was "drowning in an ocean of tears." [1] Rav Chaim Ozer reflected on the seeming incongruence of abstract pursuits such as [publishing] divrei Torah during times of crisis.

These are his immortal words. "The study of Torah has been an elixir of life. Delving into and reflecting upon the pathways of Torah has served as a spring-like source of life restoring waters. Every yeshiva acts as a citadel for Judaism. The spread of Torah study shields from tribulation and protects

against assimilation. Torah and its luminescence bring people back to the true way of life. The study of Torah has sustained our existence until this very day, preventing assimilation [amongst those who study]. We beheld a remarkable vision during the days of the terrible war, days of oppression and displacement. When the Jewish people wandered from their homes and the yeshivos were also forced to wander...the spirit of Torah mitzvos, which is the soul of the nation, drew Jews together...and our brethren in every place exerted themselves mightily to strengthen the Torah and yeshivos." [2]

May these divrei Torah help in some small way to achieve what Rav Chaim Ozer outlines, especially to shield our soldiers and all our brethren in Eretz Yisroel from all tribulation.

II

War and Faith

Some of our soldiers, Hashem yikom damam, brave, noble, and altruistic, have already made the ultimate sacrifice. Many others, Hashem yishmereim, risking life and limb, continue selflessly serving. Millions of our brethren, especially in the southern areas of Eretz Yisroel, live in mortal danger and tension from rocket fire. What is it all about? It is vitally important that we have perspective on the war against Hamas.

In his Mishneh Torah Rambam provides perspective on any and every war between Israel and her enemies.

ומאחר שיכנס אדם בקשרי המלחמה ישען על מקוה ישראל ומושיעו בעת צרה וידע שעל ייחוד השם הוא עושה מלחמה וישים נפשו בכפו ולא יירא ולא יפחד...וכל הנלחם בכל לבו בלא פחד ותהיה כוונתו לקדש את השם...

Once, however, he [i.e., the soldier] has joined the ranks [of war], he should put his reliance upon Him who is the hope of Israel, their Savior in time of trouble. He should know that he is fighting for the oneness of God, risk his life and neither fear nor be affrighted...He who fights with all his heart, without fear, with the sole intention of sanctifying the name of God..." [3] Rambam defines every war which Israel fights against her enemies as being for yichud Hashem, defending belief in the one and only God, and His sovereignty [4]. Our soldiers are not simply שלוחי דידן [our representatives]; they are שלוחי דרחמנא [HKBH-s representatives.] They are fighting to sanctify His name.

[Many unspeakable, atrocious acts of war have been and continue to be perpetrated while invoking God-s name. This ongoing chilul Hashem makes a travesty of the very pure and beautiful idea presented by the Rambam. By contrast, the stellar conduct of Tzahal, operating by a self-imposed, unparalleled moral standard as they defensively combat ruthless enemies, has been an ongoing kiddush Hashem.]

In his Epistle to Yemen, Rambam provides a framework for understanding much of Jewish history, which also sheds light on his profound religious depiction of war. HKBH elevated Am Yisroel above all other nations by giving us His Torah.

Remember that ours is the true and authentic divine religion, revealed to us through Moses, the master of the former as well as later prophets, by means of which God has distinguished us from the rest of mankind...God made us unique by His laws and precepts, and our pre-eminence is manifested in His rules and statutes, as Scripture says, in narrating God-s mercies to us, "And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Devarim 4:8).

Our pre- eminence, בחירת ישראל, has always been a source of envy and hatred. Rebelling against HKBH's choice, the nations of the world have continuously sought to destroy us.

Therefore all the nations instigated by envy and impiety rose up against us, and all the kings of the earth motivated by injustice and enmity applied themselves to persecute us. They wanted to thwart God, but He can not be thwarted. Ever since the time of Revelation, every despot or slave that has attained to power, be he violent or ignoble, has made it his first aim and his final purpose, to destroy our law, and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force, such as Amalek, Sisra, Sennacherib,

Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Hadrian, may their bones be ground to dust, and others like them. This is one...attempt to foil the divine will. [5]

This penetrating, historical analysis underlies Rambam-s words, quoted above, in Hilchos Melachim. Every war is a battle for yichud Hashem because our enemies seek to defy HKBH and His sovereign selection of the Jewish people as the Chosen People. "-Those who hate you- - these are those who hate Israel for whoever hates Israel hates the One who spoke and brought the world into being as it says, 'And those who hate You have raised their head-. Who are they? 'Against your nation they conspire secretly.'" [6] The war against Hamas is not new. It is the most recent battle in an ancient, protracted war. Hamas is one of the modern day successors to Amalek, Sisra, et al. They aim their missiles against Israel-s citizens and attack her soldiers. They seek to destroy us. But ultimately they seek to defeat HKBH, r"l.

This war against Israel over yichud Hashem has already lasted more than three millennia. How will this strife end?

"We possess the divine assurance given to Isaiah concerning any tyrant that will wish to undermine our Law and to annihilate it by weapons of war, that the Lord will demolish them so that they will have no effect. This is only a metaphorical way of saying that his efforts will be of no avail, and that he will not accomplish his purpose...This divine promise is contained in the following verse, 'No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper.'" [7] "We are in possession of the divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a preeminent community. As it is impossible for God to cease to exist, so is Israel-s destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable, as we read, "For I the Lord change not, and you, O sons of Jacob, will not be consumed- (Malachi 3:6.)" [8]

III

Urgency of Tefillah

Divine assurance not withstanding our tefillos are urgently needed. Victory is assured. The price of victory, however, is not set. We fervently pray that victory not entail any further casualties.

IV

Our Fallen Soldiers, Hashem Yikom Damam

Let us review Rambam-s depiction of war. Israel-s enemies seek to defy HKBH-s בחירת ישראל. Hence when Israel fights her enemies, she does so for the sake of yichud Hashem. Her soldiers go out to battle to sanctify Hashem-s name.

Rambam shifts from speaking of yichud Hashem to kiddush Hashem. The explanation for this shift is very simple. The essence of mitzvas kiddush Hashem is publicizing the fundamental truth of yichud Hashem. "He commanded us to sanctify His name...the substance of this commandment is that we are obligated to publicize this fundamental belief/truth in the world." [9] Hence Rambam naturally moves from speaking of yichud Hashem to kiddush Hashem.

Our soldiers are fighting to protect HKBH-s chosen people, who are under attack because of their chosenness. Eo ipso, our soldiers are fighting for yichud and kiddush Hashem. Any soldier, rachmanah litzlan, who dies in that effort has died al Kiddush Hashem. In a parallel context Chazal say so explicitly. According to Chazal, the "martyrs of Lud" occupy a uniquely exalted position in the world-to-come. [10] The martyrs of Lud are two brothers who were put to death after falsely confessing to the murder of the Emperor-s daughter. They did so in order to save the Jewish people from a blood libel and threatened extinction. [11]

In his epistle about kiddush Hashem Rambam elaborates upon Chazal. "An individual...who is killed for the sake of kiddush Hashem, even if his sins match those of Yeravam son of Nevat and his comrades he has earned his place in the world to come...And this is what our Sages, peace unto them, have said, 'no one can gain entry to the exalted place of martyrs...[such as] the martyrs of Lud.'" [12]

Our fallen soldiers Hy"d have earned an exalted spot in the world-to-come.

V

Dialectical Experience of Mourning

In Halacha mourning is a dialectical experience. The mourner is supposed to view and experience his loss from two disparate vantage points. From the human vantage point death represents tragic defeat. Experiencing loss is excruciatingly painful and leaves a gaping void. And thus the mourner is expected to cry.[13]

These tragic and painful qualities are always present, even when death r"l overtakes a person at "a good old age, mature and content." [14] The tragedy and pain are magnified manifold when young, promising, noble chayalim die. Words cannot adequately depict the tragedy or articulate the pain. Simultaneously, the mourner affirms the divine vantage point. He recites tzidduk hadin. He affirms the justice of HKBH-s judgment. Whatever HKBH does is just,[15] and for the best.[16] The divine vantage point includes the perspective from the next world. In the case of our fallen soldiers, their families, and all of us, affirm the exalted place to which their souls have ascended.

The co-existence of the human and divine vantage points generates the dialectical experience of mourning. The pain of bereft parents, windows and orphans is so great, the grief so intense. To whatever degree possible we share their pain and grief. And yet while grieving the mourners are buoyed by their faith. They know that their loved one sanctified shem shomayim and earned an exalted place in the next world.

May we speedily merit the fulfillment of Yeshayahu-s vision. "He will eliminate death forever, and Hashem Elokim will erase tears from all faces...and they will say on that day, 'Behold this is our God; we hoped to Him that He would save us; this is Hashem to whom we hoped, let us exalt and be glad in His salvation.'" [17]

[1] רמב"ם [3] שם. Translation is somewhat free. [2] הקדמה ל"ש"ת אחיעזר ח"א [1] A Maimonides Reader. See page 220.[4] In his Sefer Hamitzvot (מ"ע ב) Rambam equates yichud Hashem with kabolat malchus Shomayim. Yichud Hashem affirms not only HKBH-s oneness and uniqueness but also His sovereignty. [5] A Maimonides Reader pp. 439 – 440 [6] רש"י לבמדבר י: לה. Translation from Artscroll Sapirstein edition [7] אגרת תימן. A Maimonides Reader p. 440 [8] Ibid p. 445 [9] ט' מה"מ ע"ט [10] אגרות הרמב"ם, הוצאת מוסד הרב קוק, עמ' נה. ע' גם [12] רש"י [11] פסחים ג' בראשית כ"ה:ה. [14] מו"ק כ"ו [13] סנהדרין מ"ו בענין הרגיו מלכות שלא בדין מקטלי ישעיהו כ"ה:ה-ט [17] ברכות ס [16] דברים ל"ב:ד [15] Artscroll translation. [15] Copyright © 2014 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Massei: The Merit of Building the Land of Israel

The Ramban understood this verse as the Biblical source for the mitzvah to settle and build up the Land of Israel:

"You shall take possession of the Land and settle it; for I have given you the Land to possess it" (Num. 33:53)

The following remarkable story was told by Yigal Gal-Ezer, who served as the vice state comptroller of Israel. In his younger days, Gal-Ezer would often visit Rav Kook in order to be inspired from his holy presence.

The Yemenite Visitor

During one visit, I found the rabbi immersed in a complex Talmudic topic. Suddenly, there was a hesitant knocking at the door. The door opened partially, and a Yemenite Jew - slight of stature, with streaks of white in his beard and peiyot - entered the room. The guest locked the door behind him and stood in the doorway, his back to the door. He lowered his head to the floor, as if he was afraid to look at the rabbi directly. Rav Kook lifted his eyes from his Talmud and studied the man.

"Come closer, my son." With a pleasant voice, the Rav tried to instill confidence in the visitor.

With slow steps, the man drew near to the rabbi's desk. He remained standing, head down.

"What is disturbing you, my son?"

"Honored rabbi," he began with a frail, hesitant voice. "I came to ask the rabbi an important question."

"Ask, my son, ask," Rav Kook responded, encouraging him to continue.

"For twenty-five years, I have worked from morning to evening, backbreaking work. I weeded land so that orchards could be planted. I planted saplings, I dug up stones from fields, I excavated foundations for houses in Eretz Yisrael. I invested my strength and days in hard labor. But I barely earn enough to support my family.

"I would like to ask: is it permissible for me to emigrate to America? Perhaps there my fortune will shine and I will be able to properly support my family."

The Yemenite worker finished speaking, and remained standing in silence.

For several minutes, Rav Kook sat, deep in thought. Abruptly, the rabbi stood up, pointed to his chair and commanded the man, "Sit."

The guest shook with trepidation. "Honored rabbi," he stammered, "it is improper that a stranger should sit on your chair."

"Sit," the rabbi repeated.

With short, hesitant steps, he walked around the desk until he came to the rabbi's chair. Nervously, he sat down.

As soon as he sat, his head dropped to the desk and he fell into a deep sleep. A short while later, he woke up, startled and disoriented.

The Heavenly Court

"What happened when you slept?" asked the Rav.

"I dreamt that I had passed on to the next world. My soul ascended to heaven. When I reached heaven's gates, there was an angel standing at the entrance who directed me to the heavenly court. There I saw scales - scales of justice.

Suddenly carriages drawn by horses swung out in front of me. They were loaded with packages, some small, some medium-sized, and some large. The angels began unloading the packages, and they placed them on one side of the scales. It sunk down due to the weight of the load, until it nearly reached the ground.

"What is the meaning of these packages?" I asked the angel standing before me.

"These are your sins and faults, mortal man, from your days on earth. Everything is accounted for."

I felt broken and disheartened.

Suddenly, other carriages arrived. These were loaded with dirt, rocks, stones, and sand. The angels loaded all of these on the other side of the scales. It began to lift up the side of sins and transgressions.

"What is the meaning of these bundles of dirt?" I asked.

"These are the stones, rocks, and dirt which your hands labored to remove from the ground of the Holy Land. They come to speak in your defense, for your share in settling the Land of Israel..."

Trembling, I stared at the scale's side of merits. I saw it dipping lower and lower, lifting the side of guilt. Then the side of merits ceased moving; it stopped just as it outweighed the sins by a small amount."

"You see, my son," Rav Kook told the man gently. "You have received your answer from heaven."

(Adapted from Malachim Kivnei Adam, pp. 321-322)

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Do Clothes Make the Man? Not if They are Washed During the Nine Days!

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Several other articles of mine relating to the observances of the Nine Days are available for reading or downloading on RabbiKaganoff.com

The Mishnah teaches that "Mishenichnas Av mema'atim besimcha," "Once Av enters, we decrease our happiness" (Taanis 26b). Although the Mishnah does not clarify what we must do to decrease our happiness, the Gemara (Yevamos 43a) lists four activities that are banned during these days:

(1) We decrease our business activities.

(2) We refrain from construction and planting intended for joyous reasons (Yerushalmi Taanis, cited by Tosafos, Yevamos 43a s.v. Milisa).

(3) We do not conduct weddings.

(4) We do not make a festive meal to celebrate an engagement. (This interpretation of the Gemara Yevamos follows the Ramban in Toras Ha'adam and the Tur Orach Chayim 551, but is not the approach used by Rashi ad loc.)

So, why don't we launder clothes during the entire Nine Days, if the Gemara mentions nothing of this prohibition?

Although the mishnah does mention a prohibition against laundering during the month of Av, it does not prohibit laundering until the motzei Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av.

(The days from the motzei Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av until Tisha B'Av are called "the week in which Tisha B'Av occurs.") Similarly, during these days one may not launder bed linens, tablecloths, or clothes belonging to a gentile. It is also forbidden to wash children's clothing during these days, although there is a dispute why the prohibition was extended to children's clothing. Some contend that this is because of chinuch - to train children to be aware of the loss of the Beis HaMikdash, while others contend that adults feel the mourning in a greater way when they see children wearing unwashed clothes.

DOES ANY HALACHIC DIFFERENCE RESULT FROM THIS DISPUTE?

Indeed there does. According to the reason that we are training children to feel the mourning, the prohibition applies only to clothes of children old enough to appreciate our mourning over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Thus some poskim permit washing clothing of children younger than eight years old (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 551:38, based on Rama). Other poskim prohibit washing all children's clothing (Shulchan Aruch 551:14), while a third opinion permits washing garments of children, but only very young children (Ben Ish Chai, Devorim 6). The two latter opinions both follow the approach that the reason children do not wear freshly laundered clothes is so that adults feel the mourning in a greater way.

NINE DAYS WITHOUT FRESH LAUNDRY

So far, we have not found any source that prohibits doing laundry for the entire Nine Days. At some point in Jewish history, Ashkenazim began to observe the prohibition against laundering or wearing fresh laundry earlier, prohibiting these practices from Rosh Chodesh Av (Rama 551:3). Most Sefardim do not follow this practice, but launder and wear fresh laundry from Rosh Chodesh until Shabbos Chazon. (Although the Kaf HaChayim is more stringent and follows Rama's approach [551:64], the Ben Ish Chai [Devorim 6] and most other Sefardic authorities disagree.) Thus, when Tisha B'Av falls on Tuesday, Sefardim do not launder or wear fresh laundry for the three days from Motzei Shabbos through the Tuesday of Tisha B'Av, whereas Ashkenazim stop on the Monday before, which is Rosh Chodesh.

WHY ARE ASHKENAZIM MORE STRINGENT THAN THE MISHNAH?

If the Mishnah permits laundering before the week in which Tisha B'Av occurs, why did Ashkenazim ban laundry from Rosh Chodesh?

In the times of Chazal, the memories of the Beis HaMikdash were still fresh in people's minds and a shorter period of mourning was a sufficient reminder of the Churban. But now, after our long golus, we require a longer period of mourning to arouse our feelings and mourn properly for the Beis HaMikdash. Some commentaries point out that the public mourning follows the exact opposite procedure of private mourning. Whereas private mourning moves from the more intense mourning periods to less intense, the public mourning begins with the Three Weeks, then to the Nine Days, the week in which Tisha B'Av occurs, Erev Tisha B'Av, and finally the intense mourning of Tisha B'Av, itself. By gradually increasing the intensity of the mourning, we should be able to reach the appropriate sense of loss on Tisha B'Av.

ARE THERE ANY HALACHIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FIRST PART OF THE NINE DAYS AND THE SECOND PART?

Since the days from Rosh Chodesh until Shabbos are prohibited only by custom, whereas the days after Shabbos are prohibited because of Takanas Chazal, do any halachic differences result from this distinction?

Yes, there do! Many poskim contend that one may wash children's clothes until the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 551:38; Mishnah Berurah 551:82, quoting Chayei Odom). They assume that the Ashkenazic custom banning doing laundry from Rosh Chodesh did not include children's laundry, and therefore, these clothes may be washed until the time banned by Chazal.

Another halachic difference between the first and latter part of the Nine Days is that someone who has only one of a certain garment, say, one shirt, may wash it during the first part of the Nine Days. The poskim explain that the custom not to launder during the beginning of the Nine Days should not be more stringent than Chol HaMoed, when someone who has only one of a certain garment may wash it (Mishnah Berurah 551:29, quoting Elyah Rabbah).

WHY IS LAUNDERING PROHIBITED DURING THESE DAYS?

Rashi (Taanis 29b) explains that doing laundry distracts one from the mourning atmosphere that should pervade this week. For this reason, one may not launder clothes during these days, even if he intends to put them aside until after Tisha B'Av (Gemara Taanis 29b). One may not even give laundry to a gentile during the Nine Days (Rama 551:3), even if one tells him not to launder it until after Tisha B'Av (Magen Avraham 551:15), because even the minimum distraction involved in giving laundry to a gentile distracts one's attention from the mourning (Levushei Serad). If laundry is forbidden due to the distraction it causes, certainly recreational activity should be avoided completely.

However, all this does not explain why one may not wear freshly laundered clothes during these days, since this is not distracting (Ramban, Rashba, Ran, all quoted by

Beis Yosef). The reason why wearing freshly laundered clothes is prohibited is because it violates the public period of mourning that these days represent.

NOTHING TO WEAR

If someone's garment became dirty or sweaty so that he can no longer wear it and all his remaining clothes are freshly laundered, he may change into those clothes. If he has nothing to change into, he may even launder the soiled garment (see Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 381:3, 389:2; Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh Deah 389:6, 7; Gesher HaChayim pg 234). However, one should prevent this from happening by preparing sufficient "worn" clothing before Rosh Chodesh. One does this by changing into different shirts, wearing each one for a half-hour or so, and then putting them away to wear during the Nine Days (or the week of Tisha B'Av, if he/she is a Sefardi [see Ben Ish Chai, Devorim 6; Kaf HaChayim 551:9]). Towels should also be used at least once before Rosh Chodesh, in order to allow their use during the Nine Days (ibid.).

One may spot-clean a garment, if he is concerned that the stain will set, or if he is embarrassed to wear such a garment and has no substitute. It is also permitted to soak a dirty garment without completing its laundering, in order to facilitate its cleaning after Tisha B'Av (Piskei Teshuvos 511:18).

FRESH FOR SHABBOS

To fulfill a mitzvah, one may wash and wear fresh clothes, even during the week that Tisha B'Av occurs (see Rama; Mishnah Berurah 30). Chazal did not prohibit laundering done for a mitzvah; they considered the observance of the mitzvah to be more important. According to this reasoning, one could argue that it is permitted to wash laundry to provide fresh linen for one's guests. For the same reason, one may wear fresh clothes and use fresh tablecloths for Shabbos (Rama 551:3). However, one may not use fresh bed linens, presumably because this will not significantly diminish the dignity of Shabbos (Taz 551:4, quoting Maharshal; Mishnah Berurah 551:33). Although one may wear freshly laundered clothes on Shabbos, one may not use Shabbos to prepare garments for weekday wear. Thus, one may not change one's clothes more than is necessary on Shabbos in order to have more pre-worn clothes for after Shabbos. However, if one is changing one's clothes in any case, he is permitted to wear different clothes, thus leaving the clothes from which he has changed available for use. This is permitted, because one is not changing his clothes only for the purpose of the weekday (Ben Ish Chai, Devorim 6).

THURSDAY IS WASH DAY

The poskim dispute whether one may launder on Thursday of the Nine Days if he does not have freshly laundered clothing for Shabbos (Magen Avraham 551:14; however see Darchei Moshe who implies that one may not). The poskim imply that this is permitted only on Thursday, but not on any other day of the week.

Why not do the laundry on Friday?

Around the time of the construction of the Second Beis HaMikdash, the great Jewish leader, Ezra, instituted ten takanos, special decrees, for the benefit of the Jewish people. One of them was that laundry should be washed every Thursday in honor of Shabbos (Bava Kama 82a).

Why did Ezra specify Thursday? The poskim dispute this point. Some contend that Ezra prohibited laundering on Friday, in order to guarantee that Friday remain available for other Shabbos preparations (Magen Avraham 242:3). Other poskim contend that the focus of Ezra's takanah was different: Do the laundry on Thursday in order to assure that one has fresh clothes for Shabbos. In earlier generations, laundering was extremely time consuming, and it was impractical to launder on Erev Shabbos (Elyah Rabbah 242:9). Furthermore, the clothes would not be dry for Shabbos. Therefore, Ezra ruled that one should launder on Thursday, in order to guarantee fresh laundry for Shabbos. Because of this, there is a year-round obligation every Thursday to check that the family has clean laundry, linens, and tablecloths for Shabbos, and if not, to launder them. Although most later poskim do not follow the first opinion that the takanah was against laundering on Friday (Shaarei HaTziyun 242:16), one should still, preferably, do laundry on Thursday rather than on Friday. However, when Tisha B'Av occurs on Thursday one may launder on Thursday night or Friday according to all opinions (see Magen Avraham 551:18, 558:1).

WHAT OTHER PROHIBITIONS APPLY TO CLOTHING DURING THE NINE DAYS?

One may not dry-clean clothes or iron them (Shulchan Aruch 551:3). Again, Ashkenazim observe these laws from Rosh Chodesh, and Sefardim, from the motza'ei Shabbos of Shabbos Chazon. However, it is permitted to repair shoes and clothes during the Nine Days (Kaf HaChayim 551:107; Piskei Tshuvos 551:ftn. 157).

One may not wear Shabbos clothes or other unusually nice clothing during the weekdays of the Nine Days. A notable exception is that the celebrants of a bris are permitted to wear Shabbos clothes, since for them, it is a Yom Tov (Rama 551:1). The poskim record different customs concerning whether one wears weekday or Shabbos clothes on Shabbos Chazon. Our custom is to wear Shabbos clothes on

Shabbos Chazon. Some poskim hold that one should change out of the Shabbos clothes immediately after Shabbos (based on Magen Avraham 262:2 and 559:10)

WHO IS A CELEBRANT?

Which celebrants may wear Shabbos clothes at a weekday bris during the Nine Days? According to all opinions, the baby's parents, the sandek (who holds the baby when the bris is performed), the mohel, and the woman who brings the baby to the bris (the kvaterin) may wear Shabbos clothes (Rama 551:1). Other opinions permit the baby's grandparents and other close relatives to wear Shabbos clothes (Shaarei Teshuvah, end of 551:3), as well as the person honored with placing the baby on the kisei shel Eliyahu, those who bring the baby closer to the bris ("cheika"), and the kvatter (see Elyah Rabbah 551:27). Each person should consult his rav for practical psak. (Incidentally, this discussion is a source from which it is learned that family members attending a bris during the rest of the year should wear Shabbos clothes!)

NEW CLOTHES

One may not wear new clothes during the Nine Days, even on Shabbos (Magen Avraham 551:6; Mishnah Berurah 551:9, 45; Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 3:80), nor may one tailor or purchase new clothes or shoes (Rama 551:6-7). (If these are garments for which one would usually recite shehechyanu, then one should not wear them the entire Three Weeks.) However, one may purchase non-leather footwear, even during the week of Tisha B'Av, if one has no suitable footwear for Tisha B'Av. This is considered a matter of extenuating circumstances, as, otherwise, he would have to walk all day Tisha B'Av without footwear (Shu't Igros Moshe 3:80).

HOTEL

What do I do if I am in a hotel during the Nine Days?

If one may not use freshly laundered bed linens during the Nine Days, what should one do if one stays in a hotel or as a guest in someone else's home in that period? May one use the freshly laundered sheets? The poskim permit guests to use fresh bed linens, since most people are uncomfortable using bed linens slept on by someone else (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 10:44; Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 13:61). The Minchas Yitzchak suggests soiling the linens on the floor a little before using them. Depending on circumstances, one might also be able to bring one's own used linens. In any instance, one should instruct the hotel not to change the bed linens until after Tisha B'Av.

PLEASURE BATHING DURING THE NINE DAYS

The Gemara mentions no prohibition against bathing during the Nine Days. To quote the Ran, "Washing one's body is permitted, whether in hot water or cold - and even the entire body - for Chazal prohibited washing only on Tisha B'Av itself. However, meticulous people have the custom not to bathe the entire week."

On the other hand, the Tur, quoting Avi Ezri, writes that the widespread custom is to forbid bathing from Rosh Chodesh until after Tisha B'Av. Furthermore, he states that someone who violates this custom violates "al titosh toras imecha, - do not forsake the teaching of your mother," referring, here, to the customs of the Jewish people. The Shulchan Aruch records two customs: one, to refrain from bathing from Rosh Chodesh, and the other, to refrain only during the week of Tisha B'Av. The custom is not to bathe for pleasure during the entire Nine Days, but bathing for hygienic and health purposes is permitted. A rav should be consulted as to when and how this applies.

THE REWARD FOR OBSERVING THE NINE DAYS

The Medrash (Medrash Rabbah Shmos 15:21) teaches that Hashem will bring forth ten new creations in the era of Moshiach:

1. He will create a new light for the world.
2. He will bring forth a freshwater spring from Yerushalayim whose waters will heal all illnesses.
3. He will create trees that produce new fruits with curative powers every month.
4. All the cities of Eretz Yisroel will be rebuilt, including even Sodom and Amora.
5. Hashem will rebuild Yerushalayim with sapphire stone, that will glow and attract all the nations of the world to come and marvel at the city's beauty.
6. The cow and the bear, the wolf and the sheep will graze together, and their young will play together (see Yeshaya 11:7).
7. Hashem will make a covenant with all the creatures of the world, and people will beat their swords and spears into plows and pruning hooks (see Hoshea 2:20.)
8. There will be no more crying in the city of Yerushalayim.
9. Death will perish forever.
10. Everyone will be joyful, and tears will be wiped away from every face.

The Kaf HaChayim (551:1) states that everyone who observes the halachos of the first ten days of Av meticulously, thereby demonstrating his own sense of loss over the churban of Yerushalayim, will witness these ten miracles. May we all merit to see them speedily and in our days.

By Rabbi Avi Weiss

July 24, 2014 Thursday 26 Tammuz 5774

Especially in this difficult hour, it is a time to run to Israel rather than from Israel.

This is not the first time I've come to Israel during war. But this time is different. I'm here not only because I love Israel. I'm here as a grandfather with two grandsons in the IDF - one on an air force base doing important defense work, another in Gaza, putting his life on the line with thousands of others in Operation Protective Edge. It is excruciating to witness the concern of my daughter and son-in-law preoccupied every minute about the well-being of their son in Gaza. Their concern is shared by the parents and family members of thousands of Israeli soldiers.

What I have found here is an unbelievable sense of unity.

With rare exceptions, this is not a war of the Left or Right. It is an operation that has united all of Israel. No nation-state can tolerate rockets fired at more than 80 percent of its population.

And no nation-state can tolerate tunnels, often dug beneath mosques and schools, that allow terrorists to infiltrate, to maim and murder.

The most basic right and responsibility of government is to defend its citizens. Imagine rockets fired from Cuba into southern Florida. Cuba would not have long to live.

There is also a great sense of unity in the ethical underpinnings of the operation. There are no two sides. The moral compass is clear - a simple choice between right and wrong. To paraphrase Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu: We use missiles to protect our children; they use children to protect their missiles.

I would add that while Hamas targets and revels in the death of Jews, we mourn the loss of innocent Palestinian life.

This is a time for the Jewish community in the US and around the world to rally around the Jewish state, to march and demonstrate in the hundreds of thousands in Washington and elsewhere. Especially in this difficult hour, it is a time to run to Israel rather than from Israel.

Just being here shows support.

And once here, there is much to do.

One of the people who gets it is Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York City. Defying the Federal Aviation Administration ban on US airlines flying to and from Israel, Bloomberg arrived Wednesday on El Al. He understands that prohibiting planes from landing here grants a victory to Hamas. While Hamas, much like the Russian separatists in Ukraine, might have no compunction about taking down a commercial airliner, Bloomberg understands that if Israel says it's safe, you can depend on it. Israel knows much more about safety considerations here than the FAA. Standing among the 30,000 mourners who attended the funeral of St.-Sgt. Max Steinberg, 24, an American lone soldier, a soldier without a family in Israel, who was killed in action this week, I was overcome. Max was no longer alone. He had become a soldier of all Israel.

Moments before the service began, an announcement was made. It directed the crowd at the Mount Herzl Military Ceremony in Jerusalem to follow orders in the event that a rocket-warning siren is sounded during the funeral - to lie down on the ground for 10 minutes after which the service would continue. Standing shoulder to shoulder with such a mass of people, I wondered how the order could be followed. I thought of the rabbinic legend that even though all of Israel stood crowded one against the other in the ancient Temple, there was still space for each to bow down before the Lord. Such is the power of pure unity.

At the burial, Max's father remarked that joining the IDF was Max's decision. He continued, And if you'll ask me whether I regret Max's joining the IDF, my answer is no.

A powerful message. If Max can join the IDF, put his life on the line and ultimately give his life for Israel, we too can demand of ourselves that we give all we can to the Jewish state.

The words of Max's brother at the funeral, quoted from the songwriter Bob Marley, still ring in my ears: "Live for yourself, and you will live in vain. Live for others, and you will live again."

Rabbi Avi Weiss is senior rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale in Bronx, New York. He is the founder of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School and Yeshivat Maharar. His most recent book, *Holistic Prayer: A Guide to Jewish Spirituality*, was just published by Maggid Books.

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This is the time to unite behind Israel