



BS"D

To: parsha@parsha.net
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAYECHI - 5771

In our 16th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to subscribe@parsha.net. Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com. A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net>. It is also fully searchable.

To sponsor an issue (proceeds to Tzedaka) email cshulman@gmail.com

from Ateres Hashavua <atereshashavua@gmail.com>
date Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 4:55 PM
subject Ateres Hashavua

Attached is ... a quick page of Halachos on **Asara Beteveis** written by one of the rabbeim of Mesivts Ateres Yaakov.

Some Fast Halachos

When Asarah B'Teives Falls Out on Erev Shabbos

By Rabbi Manoach Gelbfish compiled from halachos heard from Rabbi Menachem Fiefer -Rav of Agudas Yisroel of Bayswater

Early Shabbos? The Mishnah Berurah says that even if one made an early Shabbos he must still fast till tzais. (כא:רמט)

Taste food Erev Shabbos? The Mishnah Berurah says that a woman may taste and spit out small amounts of food on Erev Shabbos to see if it tastes right. (ותקס)

Shower on the fast? Even though there are those that are Machmir on Taanasim not to shower as usual, the Mishnah Berurah says that on Erev Shabbos one may shower as usual. (ותקנ)

Avinu Malkainu and Tachanun are **not** said at Mincha (א:תקנ ב"מ)

Skip Shalom Aleichem? It is told that the Chafetz Chaim either skipped Shalom Aleichem or sang it on the way home from Shul in order to avoid having his guests wait. If the family has a hard time waiting it is okay to pre-sing or postpone Shalom Aleichem. Similarly I remember being at my Rebbe's (Harav Shlomo Volbe Z'tal) Shabbos table and saw him sing Aishes Chayil in middle of the meal (for what seemed to be a Shalom Bayis issue). (*Check with your wife first about this one!*)

Coffee or juice after Kiddush? One may have a coffee or other drink right after (but not before) Kiddush. If one had a dairy drink, he should wash his mouth well and eat a pareve solid before eating Fleishigs (and wait half an hour if that is your minhag).

Bracha on the coffee (or other drink)? If one drank more than 2 oz of wine or grape juice and the coffee was on the table (or one had in mind that he will drink the coffee) then a Shehakol is not necessary on the coffee. If he drank less than 2 oz he should hear a Shehakol from someone else or make a Shehakol on a solid food. If he did not have the coffee on the table or did not have in mind to drink the coffee, then he should make a Shehakol on the coffee. (ד ברכות הלכות 102_)

Woman make Kiddush? Motzi her sons? A woman is as obligated in Kiddush as a man. Therefore an adult woman can make Kiddush for herself or for anyone else. A child is only obligated מדרבנן and should not make Kiddush for any adult. (In fact even a boy who has had a Bar Mitzvah should not make Kiddush Shabbos night for adults until it is sure that he is physically mature.)

Fw

From hamelaket@gmail.com

From Yeshiva.org.il <subscribe@yeshiva.org.il>

reply-To subscribe@yeshiva.org.il

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Asarah BeTeiveis on Friday?!

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In the Yeshiva where I teach, one of my students came to me rather incredulously- "I heard that the Tenth of Teiveis falls on a Friday this year—but I thought that we cannot have fast days on a Friday? I don't remember a fast ever falling on Friday!"

Although Moshe's halachic assumption is inaccurate, it is easy to comprehend why he made this mistake. In our current fixed calendar, the only fast day that ever falls on a Friday is Asarah BeTeiveis. And the last time this happened was exactly ten years ago, before he was old enough to fast.

There is another, more sophisticated, basis for Moshe's question. In a "regular" (kesidrah) year Marcheshvan (usually, but inaccurately called simply "Marcheshvan") contains 29 days and Kislev 30. In such a year, Asarah BeTeiveis always falls on the same day of the week as Rosh Hashanah. And, since Rosh Hashanah cannot fall on a Friday, one might think that Asarah BeTeiveis should not fall on Friday either.

However, our fixed calendar system has fourteen "types of years," seven leap years, and seven common years. Of those fourteen "types of years," four of them result in Asarah BeTeiveis falling on Friday, two of them in a leap year and two in a common year. This is because if Rosh Hashanah falls on Thursday and the year must have a day added (sheleimah), (I explain this concept in a different article which I will be sending in one of the nearcoming weeks) the day added is the 30th of MarMarcheshvan, which postpones Asarah BeTeiveis to a day later in the week – to Friday. In addition, if Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos and the year must have a day deleted (chaseirah), the day subtracted is the 30th of Kislev, which moves Asarah BeTeiveis forward one day in the week – again to Friday. Since both of these scenarios can happen in either a normal year or in a leap year, there are four different "years" that result in Asarah BeTeiveis falling on Friday.

This year provides an example. Rosh Hashanah fell on Thursday and the year is sheleimah, meaning that both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 30 days, which avoids Rosh Hashanah from falling next year on Wednesday. But adding the 30th day to Marcheshvan causes Asarah BeTeiveis to fall on Friday. This type of year is referred to as a ??? year, the ? standing for Thursday (the fifth day of the week), the day of Rosh Hashanah; the ? for sheleimah, and the ? for the day of week that Pesach will fall this year, which is Tuesday, the third day of the week, which result because this is a leap year.

(By the way, the year 5774, which occurs in three years, is also a ??? year exactly as this year is, so remember not to throw away your Hebrew calendar at the end of the year; you can reuse it in three years. On the other hand, the molad times will be different, as will the times for zman keriyas shma [which is dependent on the solar calendar], so maybe that is not such a good idea. Good thing for the calendar makers.)

If we plan a bit ahead, we will discover that all four types of years when Asarah BeTeiveis falls on Friday will occur within the next few years. The year 5781 (the end of the secular year 2020), is a common year in which Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos. Both Marcheshvan and Kislev are 29 days that year, which results that the last day of Chanukah that year is a Friday, the 3rd of Teiveis, and the fast of Asarah BeTeiveis falls on the following Friday.

BACK TO BACK FASTS

If we look ahead to the Hebrew calendar years 5784 and 5785, corresponding roughly to the secular years 2023 through 2025, we discover the fairly unusual situation of having back-to-back years with Asarah BeTeiveis falling on Friday both in 5784 (2023) and in 5785,

(when it falls on January 10, 2025), each for a different reason: In 5784, which is a leap year, Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos and it is a chaseirah since both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 29 days, thus causing Asarah BeTeiveis to occur one day earlier in the week than Rosh Hashanah – Friday. 5785 is a common year when Rosh Hashanah falls on Thursday and it is a sheleimah when both Marcheshvan and Kislev have 30 days. Of course, I'm sure you noticed that there is no Asarah BeTeiveis in the secular year 2024, but it falls out twice in 2025. I will explain this phenomenon shortly.

A rocket scientist once attempted to explain to me why Asarah BeTeiveis falls occasionally consecutively on Friday. I am going to attempt to explain what he told me. When Rosh Hashanah in a leap year falls on Shabbos, that year cannot be a regular leap year of 384 days, because that would cause the next Rosh Hashanah to fall on Friday, violating the rule of lo adu Rosh, since this would result in Yom Kippur falling on Sunday. To avoid this happening, that year must either be shortened by a day (chaseirah), moving the next Rosh Hashanah forward to Thursday, or by adding a day (sheleimah), pushing the next Rosh Hashanah to Shabbos. Which of these happens is dependent on when the molad of the new moon for the next Rosh Hashanah falls. But if the year is indeed chaseirah, the loss of the day moves Asarah BeTeiveis to Friday, a day earlier in the week than was Rosh Hashanah.

Now then: When the year is made chaseirah (and Rosh Hashanah of the second year falls on Thursday as a result), it sometimes results that the second year requires an extra day to avoid the following year's molad from falling too early. What has basically transpired is that because one year was shortened by a day, the next year requires a compensation of an additional day. When this happens, both Marcheshvan and Kislev in the second year now have 30 days. This results in Asarah BeTeiveis in the second year being postponed from Thursday to Friday.

If I understood the rocket scientist correctly, the only way this phenomenon of Asarah BeTeiveis falling in two consecutive years on a Friday is when the first year is a leap year that begins on Shabbos that was chaseirah and the second year is a common sheleimah year that begins on Thursday. Every time I have found this on the calendar it has been such a phenomenon, but I take no responsibility for ascertaining that this is the only way this can happen. I make no claim to be a rocket scientist.

What did Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon have uniquely in common?

The last time Asarah BeTeiveis fell in two consecutive years on Fridays was in 5733 (on December 15, 1972, when Richard Nixon was president) and 5734 (on January 4, 1974). Few of those reading this article were fasting the previous time that Asarah BeTeiveis occurred on Friday in back-to-back years since this was on December 20, 1901 and January 9, 1903. Teddy Roosevelt was president, having succeeded to the office when William McKinley succumbed on September 14, 1901, to the wounds inflicted by Leon Frank Czolgosz. According to my research, these were the only two times the phenomenon of Asarah BeTeiveis falling in two consecutive years on Fridays occurred in the Twentieth Century. Is there any significance to the fact that both Roosevelt and Nixon were Republicans? Let us wait eagerly to see who wins the election of 2020 to see who will be president in 2023 and on January 10, 2025, the next back-to-back Asarah BeTeiveis on Friday. Perhaps the Republicans can keep this streak running!

The wait for the next back-to-back Friday Asarah BeTeiveis observances after 2023 and 2025 is not quite as long. Someone planning on good health and longevity can look forward to fasting on two Fridays of Asarah BeTeiveis in the years 5831 (on December 12, 2070) and 5832 (January 1, 2072), providing an auspicious way to celebrate the secular New Year.

By now, you presumably have noted that the secular years 1902 and 1973 both missed having Asarah BeTeiveis, and that so will 2024 and 2071. That a secular year misses Asarah BeTeiveis is not particularly significant. Almost every halachic leap year causes the pushing of Asarah BeTeiveis into the next secular year, and means that Asarah

BeTeiveis misses one secular year, and falls out in January and then December of the year following. As a result, seven of nineteen secular years miss out on Asarah BeTeiveis. (Actually, it is slightly less, since about twice a century Asarah BeTeiveis in a leap year falls on December 30 or 31.)

COINCIDENCE OR DELIBERATE

Biblical Source

Although it would appear that the reason no other fast occurs on a Friday is simply a coincidence of the fixed calendar, one early authority contends that observing Asarah BeTeiveis on Friday has a Tanach basis and deep halachic significance. The Avudraham explains that since the verse in Yechezkel (24:2) identifies the Tenth of Teiveis as etzem hayom hazeh, this very day, these words require that Asarah BeTeiveis be observed on the date that it occurs and may not be moved. The Avudraham expressly states that if Asarah BeTeiveis were to fall on Shabbos, we would be required to fast on Shabbos just as we are required to fast when it falls on a Friday. This means that prior to the establishing of our calendar by Hillel Hasheini, whenever Asarah BeTeiveis fell on Shabbos (during the period after the Churban), Klal Yisrael fasted on Shabbos, similar to the fasting we do when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbos! This ruling of the Avudraham seems unusual – particularly, since there is no record in the Gemara of such a halacha. We can easily understand why the Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 550) takes strong issue with Avudraham's approach, and questions why one should treat Asarah BeTeiveis more strictly than any other rabbinically ordained fast. In addition, Avudraham's position conflicts both with Rashi (Megillah 5a s.v. aval) and the Rambam (Hilchos Taanis 5:5), both of whom mention that when Asarah BeTeiveis occurs on Shabbos, the fast is postponed to Sunday.

Nevertheless, we must understand the conceptual basis why the Avudraham understands Asarah BeTeiveis to be a stricter fast than the others. It would seem that its significance is because it is the beginning of the tragedies that resulted in the churban, a message we should take to heart when we observe this fast, whether or not it occurs on Friday.

From TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
to weeklydt@torahweb2.org
date Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 10:53 PM
subject Rabbi Yonason Sacks - Three Pillars

Rabbi Yonason Sacks **Three Pillars**

In the introduction to "Ein Yaakov," the author cites a classic Tannaic dispute pertaining to what constitutes a "klal gadol baTorah - great rule in the Torah." While Ben Zoma identifies "Shema Yisroel" as the paradigmatic "klal gadol baTorah", Ben Nanas cites "v'ahavta l'reacha" and Shimon ben Pazi quotes "es hakevesh echad ta'aseh baboker". Perhaps one could suggest that these three opinions reflect the three pillars of the world described in the Mishnah Avos (1:2): "Shema Yisroel" refers to the paramount importance of Torah; "es hakevesh echad ta'aseh baboker" alludes to the Avodah; and "v'ahavta l'reacha" highlights gemilus chasadim.

While the opinions of Ben Zoma and Ben Nanas are quite understandable, the citation of Shimon ben Pazi appears to demand explanation. Why does Shimon ben Pazi overlook broader, more universalistic aphorisms in favor of a seemingly specific and technical halachah pertaining to the daily Mikdash service?

Perhaps Shimon ben Pazi wishes to convey that the foundation of the Torah rests upon consistency and persistence in the service of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Just as the Tamid offering is brought twice daily, day-in and day-out, our commitment to Torah and mitzvos must always be present, regardless of emotional reluctance or personal hindrance. Indeed, the Mesillas Yesharim (chapter 25) teaches that true yiras shamayim can only be obtained "berov hahasmada baTorah u'deracheha b'li hefsek - through unwavering commitment to the study of Torah and its ways.

Only through constant contemplation and emulation of the ways of HaKadosh Baruch Hu can a person truly imprint the seal of Yiras Shamayim upon himself.

Perhaps one could suggest that these three pillars of the world correspond to a further symbolism as well. The Netziv teaches that the Aron and the Menorah of the Tabernacle represented the Torah: as the storage site for the tablets received at Har Sinai, the Aron represented the Written Torah, while the illumination and clarity produced by the Menorah represented the Oral Torah (see Berachos 57a and Midrash Rabbah Bereishis 91). As such, these two keilim correspond to the first pillar of the world. The Rashbatz adds that, as the ultimate site for the offering of sacrifices, the mizbeach represents avodah, or the second pillar of the world. Finally, the Ramban (Shemos 25:24) explains that the shulchan represents the infinite support of HaKadosh Baruch Hu for Bnei Yisrael, as He places His beracha upon the loaves of bread so that sustenance will flow to the entire nation. Accordingly, the shulchan may be seen as representative of the third pillar of the world, gemillus chasadim.

Asara B'Teves is a most appropriate time to be mindful of the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash and to internalize the importance of Torah, avoda and gemilus chasadim which the klai Hamikdash represent.

Copyright © 2010 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/>

From

Darash Moshe

A selection of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's choice comments on the Torah.

By Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

Parashas Vayechi

And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be included under the name of their brothers (48:5-6).

And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be included under the name of their brothers (48:5-6). Jacob's reasoning here is highly puzzling: Why should Joseph's sons born before Jacob's arrival in Egypt be considered Jacob's, while his later-born sons would belong to Joseph? The opposite would seem to make more sense, that those born to Joseph when he was alone in Egypt should belong to him, while the ones who grew up under their grandfather's guidance should belong to Jacob.

However, we can understand Jacob's claim as a profound lesson in the education a father is required to give his son, or a teacher his student. The responsibility to train children and students in the ways of Torah applies not only while they are at home or in the confines of the beis medrash, when they are relatively receptive to education. A parent or teacher must make sure his charges' training is so firmly rooted that they will continue solidly in the ways they have learned even when they are far away from the father or the rebbe, in distant lands among pagans and atheists. They must strive to equal the training Joseph received from Jacob, a training so fundamental that wherever he went, Joseph saw his father's image before him guiding him in his way, a training so powerful that under its influence Joseph raised the two sons born to him in Egypt to follow in his father's footsteps as if they had been raised by Jacob and not by their father, Joseph.

This is why Jacob claimed them as his own children, as much as Reuben and Simeon. Any later children born to Joseph after Jacob's arrival in Egypt would grow up in the Torah environment created by their uncles and cousins, and thus the impact of Jacob's greatness as seen through his chinuch to Joseph would not be as readily discernible as it was in Ephraim and Manasseh. Therefore he had no claim on them.

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Lord Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

Vayechi 5769

Is it permitted to tell a white lie? If a murderer is at large, brandishing a gun, and his intended victim takes refuge in your house, are you obligated to tell the truth when the would-be killer knocks on your door and asks, "Is he here"? Immanuel Kant, the greatest philosopher of modern times, said Yes. We should always tell the truth, whatever the circumstances and consequences. Judaism says No. Not only is it permitted to tell a white lie to save a life. It is also permitted to do so for the sake of peace.

The sages derived this from two episodes, one in this week's sedra. Jacob has died. The brothers fear that Joseph will now take revenge for the fact that they sold him into slavery. They devise a stratagem:

They sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the G-d of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

There is no evidence that Jacob ever said the words attributed to him. The sages therefore assumed that what the brothers said was a lie. They concluded that "It is permitted to change [to tell a white lie] for the sake of peace." They derived the same principle from a second source as well.

When three visitors came to Abraham in his old age and said that in a year's time Sarah would have a child, Sarah laughed, saying to herself: "After I am worn out and my husband is old, will I now have this pleasure?" G-d tells Abraham that Sarah disbelieves: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" Tactfully, He omits reference to Sarah's remark about her husband being old. This too served the sages as proof of the rule.

Both sources are necessary. If we only had the evidence of Joseph's brothers, we could not infer that what they did was right. Perhaps they were wrong to lie. And if we only had the evidence of G-d's words to Abraham, we could only infer that a half-truth is permitted [G-d does not say anything false; He merely omits some of Sarah's words], not an actual falsehood. Putting them together, the rule is established. Peace takes precedence over truth.

To understand a civilization, it is necessary not only to know the values and virtues it embraces, but also the order of priority among them. Many cultures value freedom and equality. The difficult question is: which takes precedence? Communism values equality more than freedom. Laissez-faire capitalism values freedom more than equality. They share the same ideals, but because they assign them different places in the ethical hierarchy, they result in completely different societies. Truth and truthfulness are fundamental values in Judaism. We call the Torah "the law of truth." The sages called truth the signature of G-d. Yet truth is not the highest value in Judaism. Peace is. Why so? For this, there are two reasons.

The first is the extraordinary value Judaism attributes to peace. The nineteenth century historian, Sir Henry Sumner Maine, said: "War is as old as mankind. Peace is a modern invention." He had much evidence to support him. Virtually every culture until modern times was militaristic. Heroes were mighty men of valour who fought and often died on the field of battle. Legends were about great victories in war. Conflict (between the gods, or the elements, or the children of light against the children of darkness) was written into the human script.

Against this, the prophets of ancient Israel were the first people in history to see peace as an ideal. That is why the words of Isaiah, echoed by Micah, have never lost their power:

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

This vision of a world at peace was not centuries but millennia ahead of its time.

At the same time, Judaism took a more subtle view of truth than did the philosophers of antiquity. In logic, a sentence is either true or false. There is no third alternative. In Judaism, by contrast, truth is many-faceted and elusive. Of the disputes between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, the Talmud says, "These and those are the words of the living G-d." Some believe that, though now the law is in accord with the school of Hillel, in the Messianic Age it will follow the view of Shammai. Ultimate truth forever eludes us. Maimonides held that we can only know what G-d is not; not what He is. "If I could know G-d," said one sage, "I would be G-d."

There is such a thing as truth in the eye of the beholder. The school of Hillel held that one should always say at a wedding, "The bride is beautiful and gracious." But what if she isn't, asked Shammai? Will you tell a lie? In the eyes of her husband, she is beautiful, answered Hillel.

Truth matters, but peace matters more. That is Judaism's considered judgement. Many of the greatest crimes in history were committed by those who believed they were in possession of the truth while their opponents were sunk in error. To make peace between husband and wife (Abraham and Sarah) and between brothers (Joseph and Jacob's other sons) the Torah sanctions a statement that is less than the whole truth. Dishonesty? No. Tact, sensitivity, discretion? Yes. That is an idea both eminently sensible and humane.

The right hemisphere of the brain knits it all together. The spiritual alphabet, the mystery of Western civilisation and the history of faith. The Times - Credo - July 2008. The other day I came across a statement, seemingly trivial, that to me unlocked one of the mysteries of Western civilisation. Here it is. Alphabets with vowels tend to be written from left to right. Those, like biblical Hebrew, that contain only consonants but not vowels, tend to be written from right to left. Why did I find this so interesting? The brain, as we know, has two hemispheres which specialise in different functions. The left brain is analytical, detached, linear and logical. It splits things into their components. The right brain is holistic, integrative, even intuitive. It is good at recognising patterns and handling personal relationships, including nonverbal expressions. It plays a big part in emotional intelligence. The neuroscientist Robert Ornstein calls it the seat of creativity and the soul.

The left hemisphere controls the right side of the body, and vice versa. When we move our head to the right, we are using the left hemisphere. When we move it to the left, we are bringing the right hemisphere into play. When we read something written in an alphabet, like English, that contains vowels, each word is more or less intelligible on its own. So we
Jerusalem Post :: Friday, December 17, 2010
ERAS END :: Rabbi Berel Wein

This Shabat the Jewish people complete the reading of the book of Bereshith. In rabbinic literature this book is known as the book of the Avot – the book of our forefathers and mothers, the founders of our people and our faith. It was an era of individual greatness, of lone people in a hostile world whose pursuit of truth and loyalty to their Creator influenced their world and all of humankind thereafter.

The next era, which will also produce great individuals such as Moshe and Aharon, is nevertheless the era of nationhood, of the many and of forging a new society out of a disparate and large number of individuals. There is a certain exhilaration in being the lonely individual standing against the many on matters of faith and principle. It is deemed to be courageous and many times selfless. It entails the willingness to sacrifice and to endure indignities if not even worse consequences.

Yet as difficult as it is for one to be such an individual, it is infinitely more difficult to successfully engage in the task of nation building or forming

can use the linear, sequential left brain, which controls rightward movement, which is why English is written from left to right. Not so when we read a text written in an alphabet without vowels. Imagine English without vowels. The letters ht, for example, might mean any of hot, hat, hit, hut, heat or hate. How do you tell which? Only by understanding the context, and perhaps even how the sentence ends. For that you need to use the integrative and holistic right brain, which controls leftward motion. That is why vowel-less alphabets tend to be written from right to left.

So what, you might say. But now throw two other facts into the mixture. The world's first alphabet was the proto-Sinaitic script, dating back to around 1,900BCE (Before Common Era). It was the precursor of biblical Hebrew, which went through a variety of letter forms but which remains an alphabet of consonants without vowels (though these are sometimes indicated by non-alphabetical markings). The world's first full alphabet with vowels was Ancient Greek, in the early 8th century BCE. Originally Greek, like Hebrew, was written right to left, then snake-wise (called boustrophedon), changing direction at the end of each line. But by the 5th century BCE it had stabilised as left to right, setting the pattern for virtually all other alphabets with vowels. Putting this together with what we know of the different functions of the brain hemispheres, we begin to understand why Ancient Greece gave the world its first science and philosophy, two supremely left-brain activities. Equally, we can see why the thought-world of Ancient Israel, with its integrative vision of monotheism, was so different. The Hebrew Bible, with its emphasis on personal relationships — the love of God, neighbour and stranger — is a right-brain work. We can go farther still and speculate how Christianity became a synthesis of the two. Its founder was Jewish and steeped in the religious values of Judaism. But the first Christian texts were written and read in Greek. The result was a set of right-brain ideas transcribed into a left-brain alphabet and culture. Out of that creative tension, Western civilisation was born. The corollary is equally important. The human mind is the product of both hemispheres. If the connections between them are broken, the result is dysfunction of the personality. We need both: the analytical left brain that allows us to take things apart to see how they work, and the integrative right brain that puts things together to see what they mean. Religion needs science; science needs religion. They go together like the twin hemispheres of the brain.

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting most of these items.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
<info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

positive societies out of the many. An individual has a freedom of choice and need not worry about the others in his world. Not so for one who is forced into forming societies and directing them once formed.

The great era of the Avot – the founders and individuals – ended, but the gargantuan task of building a people with a common sense of purpose and values demands a new era of greatness and leadership. And that is the message from the book of Bereshith to the coming book of Shemot in the Torah – a change in nuance and emphasis.

The long and painful era of Jewish exile was not so much a time of building societies in the Jewish world as it was simply a time of struggling survival. As such it required special mechanisms and social pressures to maintain a semblance of organized Jewish life. But to a great extent, especially here in Israel today but perhaps even in large areas of the current Jewish Diaspora as well, these mechanisms, tools, policies and outlooks are no longer really productive or relevant.

The era of nation building cannot rely on bans, pronouncements and impractical policies that may have had validity in a different era but are no longer effective. The Torah and its halachic standards do not change with

the whims and current fashions of the time. But attitudes, goals, and policies to create a Torah nation and physical entity do change and change they must.

People often quote personal opinions – not Halacha – of great leaders of the past on societal matters, and they attempt to make them the law today as well – to elevate them to the level of Halacha. My feeling has always been and is as follows: How do I know what these great people would have said had they lived today under the circumstances of Jewish nationhood, after a Holocaust, and in the face of the modern interconnected world? Is it not slightly arrogant to think that a different era entirely would not somehow have brought different responses to social and national problems, none of which are covered in the field of Halacha itself? It is hard to identify and evaluate the era in which one currently lives. It is best seen in retrospect with the perfect hindsight of history and past experience. It orders us to analyze and understand the tears – eras – of every generation separately. Yet the Torah also bids us to be aware of the fact that eras change and that time is not frozen.

The tasks set before every generation may be the same in broad scope but certainly differ in nuance and detail. The task of building a Jewish society here in the Land of Israel is the same as it always has been but the circumstances of having to do so are not those of 1948 - let alone of 1897. The adjustment to that reality has been a most difficult one for all sections of the Jewish people. We do not recognize clearly the demarcation line which separates one era from the next. But surely that line does exist and more importantly, an attempt must be made to recognize it and deal with it. The secret of the Jewish world that has allowed it to survive has been its resilience and practicality combined with faith and tradition. We have navigated many eras of change successfully and basically we have remained true to our original identity and purpose. I am certain that this will be the case regarding our current era as well. Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: VAYECHI :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The book of Bereshith ends this week on a seemingly upbeat note. The family of Yaakov, united and now more numerous, live in an apparently friendly Egyptian environment, rather smugly protected by their political influence and their growing wealth.

The last seventeen years of the life of Yaakov are the most serene of his existence. He studies Torah with his descendants and the Lord does not allow him, so to speak, to truly envision the disaster to his people and family that looms in the coming years. In the back of everyone's mind is the haunting vision shown to Abraham that his children will be enslaved and brutalized, but that prophecy apparently does not yet weigh heavily on the minds and behavior of Jacob's children and family living currently in Egypt.

The nature of humans is to postpone acting on troubling signs and biter forecasts. So the immediate troubles of the book of Shemot do not make their appearance or mark here at the conclusion of the book of Bereshith. The Torah itself apparently wishes to dwell on the good part of the narrative of Israel in Egypt before continuing later to detail the horrors of slavery and persecution that are already lurking in the wings.

Why is this so? Why is the Torah not more straightforward early on in the Egyptian section of the story of the Jewish people? And even more puzzlingly why didn't God speed up the process, so to speak, and begin the bondage sooner so that the redemption would also have happened earlier? What was this 130 year delay meant to accomplish?

There is a pattern set here that continues to appear throughout Jewish history. Our story always goes in waves and not in lurches. The problems that befall us may seem to be sudden and unexpected but in the long view that retrospective history provides, they arrive inevitably and gradually. The Lord, so to speak, provides us with respite between tragedies.

The 130 years of good times in Egypt enabled the Jews to somehow survive the eighty years of slavery and persecution. Spanish Jewry enjoyed a "golden age" of centuries before its three century decline into expulsion and forced apostasy. Polish Jews also enjoyed hundreds of years of autonomy and governmental favor and protection before declining in the three centuries which ended with its destruction.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century anti-Semitism clearly laid the groundwork for the murderous Holocaust. Yet, at the same time Western and Central European Jewry enjoyed civil rights and great social and economic success and achievement. In the constant turbulence of First Temple times, the Bible nevertheless records for us peaceful and prosperous times – forty years, eighty years – and diplomatic and military stability.

Nothing lasts forever but the history of Israel as a people provides us with the understanding that God's will will be done but that the periods of respite afforded us are necessary for our survival and development as a people. Far be it from me to analyze our current situation and what wave of history we are in. But whatever it is we should attempt to make the most of it for now and for our future.

Shabat shalom.

From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Vayechi

Please place your hand under my thigh and do kindness and truth with me - please do not bury me in Egypt. (47: 29)

We wonder why Yaakov Avinu made Yosef swear that he would be sure to bury him in Chevron in the Meoras Hamachpeilah. Was Yosef's word not sufficient guarantee that he would carry out his father's last wish? It is not as if Yosef had a history of breaking his word. He was a thoroughly righteous person. Keeping one's word is part of human decency. In Forever His Students, a collection of the Torah thoughts of Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, by Rabbi Boruch Leff, it is explained that while Yaakov certainly trusted Yosef, he feared that "excuses" - even valid ones- would interfere with his word's fruition.

Yosef's word was gold; his commitment solid. There was, however, an area of concern: there might be a legitimate reason for Yosef's inability to fulfill his word. There were good reasons why Yosef might be hampered in carrying out Yaakov's wish. Pharaoh would surely not agree. Such a famous personality as Yaakov buried in Egypt would be very good for the country. He would designate a large section of land for a tomb - perhaps even a park or museum. Pharaoh would never go along with Yosef's desire to bury his father outside of Egypt. However, once Pharaoh would hear that Yosef committed himself through an oath, it would be an altogether different perspective. Even Pharaoh would have to honor Yaakov's request. An excuse, regardless of its justifiability, is nothing more than a reason for a lack of achievement. It may be an excellent reason, but it does not change the fact that one is not accomplishing what he set out to do. The term "no excuses" means just that: no reason is accepted for failure to complete a mission. We are well aware that when something must be done - or when we really want to accomplish something - we must allow nothing to stand in our way.

There is a story told about a Vermont farmer whose neighbor wanted to borrow an axe. "Sorry," said the farmer, "I have to shave tonight." Later, his wife took him to task. "Why did you give him such a silly excuse?"

"If you do not want to do a thing," the farmer replied, "one excuse is as good as another."

In other words, excuses are a way of saying "no." Excuse is defeat. Excuse is - an excuse!

When it comes to the observance of Torah and mitzvos, we have no room for excuses. There might be difficulties, obstacles which seem impossible

to traverse, mountains too high to scale but, regardless of the challenges, Hashem does not give us assignments that exceed our abilities. Things may appear difficult but, if something is incumbent upon us, we must at least make an attempt. Hashem will see to the rest. All one needs to do is make up his mind to do. If the determination is in gear, he will move forward. The difficulty exists only as long as one has not yet made the decision to move forward. A chassid of Horav Yehudah Leib, zl, of Radzovil, had been an innkeeper for many years. He decided that it was time to move from the rural boondocks and move to the village. Now he would have greater opportunities for learning in a bais ha'medrash, davening with a minyan. In short, he felt that in his retirement, he would be able to enhance his religious observance. What could be wrong with this?

He shared his plans with the Rebbe, who did not respond either way. The man retired, and his son took over the family business. Children do not always expend the same effort for an enterprise as their parents, who established it with blood, sweat and tears. In addition, the smile and warmth exuded by the individual - to whom the business is more than a manner of earning a living - is often non-existent from the one who assumes the family business. It was no different in the case of the innkeeper. During his many years as proprietor of the inn, the chassid had provided a warm welcome for travelers, availing them comfortable, clean accommodations and nutritious meals. Understanding that being on the road, away from one's family, was particularly stressful, he made a point to inquire about their families, and was interested in their business dealings. For those who did not have the funds to pay, he was liberal in extending credit. He opened his inn free-of-charge to the poor, feeding them gratis. His son did not possess such an open heart. It was all business: no credit; no warmth; no charity. One either paid or he was not wanted.

This turn of events troubled the chassid. He had no desire to have all of his years of hard work go for naught. He returned to the Rebbe to seek guidance. The Rebbe shared the following story with the chassid:

The army was comprised of two types of soldiers: volunteers and recruits. Those who were drafted into the army were subjected to the rigors of boot camp and grueling exercises to make them fit as soldiers. The volunteers, however, received preferential treatment. Those who showed promise were given the option of joining the special training reserved for officers. One young man, who was the son of a feudal lord, waited until the very last minute until he was drafted. They had no mercy on him. The trainers went out of their way to devise "extra-special" exercises just for him. The pleasures of his civilian life had not prepared him for such punishment. So he deserted the army and moved to another city, where he lived under an assumed name. His new identity, based upon forged papers, listed him as much younger. This time, he decided to volunteer for the army. It was a difference of night and day. The treatment was much better, the exercises less rigorous. Soon, he was admitted into officer training school. Graduating quickly, he received a number of promotions, as he progressed up the ladder.

One time, in the company of a general, this young man, who was in a slightly inebriated state, told the general about a "friend" of his, the son of a feudal lord who, after deserting the army, made a new identity for himself and succeeded in becoming a successful officer. The general was no fool, and he quickly realized who this "friend" was. He became very angry, grabbing the soldier by the lapel, ripping off his officer's insignia, and quickly demoting him to common soldier. "The army needs soldiers as well as officers," he said. "You did not volunteer because of your allegiance to the emperor, but simply to further your own selfish interests. If you would have cared about the emperor, you would have looked out for his needs - not your own."

The Rebbe then said, "Hashem's 'needs' were for you to provide comfort and consideration for the travelers. He saw in you a good, kind heart that was sensitive to the needs of others. Thus, you had no right to 'retire.' You can study Mishnayos and recite Tehillim in the inn, as well as in the shul. You retired, not due to Hashem's will, but to make it easier for yourself. It was not the spiritual ascendancy that you sought. It was an escape from the inn that motivated your retirement. You are AWOL from your obligation to Hashem.

"Every person can come up with an excuse to justify why he is not praying properly or learning Torah to his utmost: 'If only I were somebody else'; 'if only I were smarter, wealthier, healthier.' These are all excuses. Hashem wants you to produce as you are - where you are. This does not excuse your spiritual obligations. You can achieve them where you are - now."

And do kindness and truth with me. (47:29)

Rashi teaches us that the kindness performed for the benefit of the deceased is true kindness, for one never expects to derive any gratitude from the beneficiary. Chesed shel emes has become the catchphrase for involvement in the area of dealing with the dead. Because of the sacred nature of this kindness and the seeming lack of remuneration, it seems to be the source of great eternal reward. Many stories abound concerning this reward. One that stands out in my mind featured the Chazon Ish.

In the settlement of Rishon L'Tzion, there lived a non-observant Jew who had emigrated to Eretz Yisrael following World War II. The product of a strictly observant home in Hungary, the war and its concentration camps wreaked havoc on his religious commitment. At this point, even the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, meant nothing to him.

It was Erev Yom Kippur 1952, and the man returned home after work as usual, unconcerned, unperturbed by the sanctity of the following day. That night, his father appeared to him in a dream, wearing his white kittel and Tallis. The father "encouraged" his son to repent his ways and return to a life of religious observance, or else his life would be cut short. At first, the man ignored the dream. The last thing one who is non-observant wants to do is change his lifestyle - for a dream! After the dream persisted for seven nights in a row, however, it was becoming more of a reality, something of concern. As distant as he was from religious observance, he was still aware that it "existed" and thrived. At that time, the leader of Torah Jewry was the Chazon Ish. Our "dreamer" decided that he would have no rest until he discovered the meaning of his dream. So, he traveled to Bnei Brak to speak with the Chazon Ish.

No sooner did he walk into the Chazon Ish's study, than the sage looked at him and exclaimed, "Alas, you perform work on Shabbos. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur have no meaning to you. Your father has no peace in the World Above. Kares, Heavenly excision, has been decreed upon you!"

The Chazon Ish finished speaking and rested his head on his arms, as if deep in thought. The man did not respond. In fact, he had not yet uttered a word. A few more minutes went by, and the Chazon Ish looked up: "In the merit of a certain mitzvah that you performed will you be granted added life... if you begin to live a life of Torah observance. Something, you must have done something special to warrant such a reprieve."

We must remember that the man had never said that he would recommit to a Torah way of life. The Chazon Ish "accepted" it. Finally, the man spoke up, "I gave charity, even though I was non-observant."

"No," said the Chazon Ish. "That is not sufficient cause to commute your punishment. Think, there must be something else for which you have merited such reward."

Suddenly, the man remembered. "There is something. When I was fourteen years old, I was home one evening when a woman came to speak with my father. It seemed that in a village some distance from ours, a young Jewish boy had died and there was no one to bury him. My father sent me - alone - to provide a Jewish burial for the boy. Here I was, myself a young teenager, traveling alone on a sacred mission to provide kever Yisrael for a young, deceased Jew. It was a dangerous time. The roads were treacherous with bands of robbers lurking in the shadows. I was under constant fear of death. Yet, I prevailed and successfully completed my holy mission."

"Yes, that is it," said the Chazon Ish.

The very next day, the man returned to a life of Torah and mitzvah observance. The mitzvah involving chesed shel emes was the precursor of a new life for him.

Now Yisrael's eyes were heavy with age, he could not see. (48:10)

Sforno explains that Yaakov Avinu's inability to see precluded him from establishing a strong bond with his grandsons, thus inhibiting him from granting his blessing in the fullest sense. In order for blessing to achieve efficacy, one must see the subject of his blessing, so that the "souls" spiritually bond. The bonding lays the groundwork for the blessing to be

effective The Mishnah Berurah (47:10) writes: "A father and mother should always pray for the spiritual welfare of their children, entreating Hashem that they diligently study Torah and remain G-d-fearing Jews who act morally and ethically." He singles out specific places in the daily tefillah in which these personal entreaties are most appropriate. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, derives from this that, in order for one's blessing to be effective, there must be a close relationship between the individual giving the blessing and he who is the subject of his blessing. Every father blesses his children Friday night prior to reciting Kiddush. Is this a blessing made by rote, or is it the blessing of a parent acutely attuned to the needs of his child, his challenges, his triumphs and failures, sensitive to his yearnings and to his inhibitions? Only such a blessing is the type for which the Patriarch declared Becha yevorach Yisrael, "By you shall Yisrael bless." Only under such circumstances, where the relationship is near and close, is the blessing worthy of serving as the exemplar of Jewish blessing.

Rav Zilberstein decries the fact that while parental love has clearly not diminished, parental interest and, hence, their relationship, has waned considerably. The culprit is, of course, our lack of time. We are busy earning a living, studying with a chavrusah, study partner, attending lectures and classes, weddings, bar-mitzvahs, and every celebration in between. We are not reneging our responsibility; we are actually overwhelmed with responsibilities that devour our available time, but our children are the victims.

I wonder if it was much different way back when I was growing up. Our parents were hard-working refugees, survivors of the Holocaust, to whom a twelve-hour day including travel was the norm. I saw my father in the morning at 6:30a.m. Shacharis, just before he left for work. We davened together. That, the Shabbos meal and Shabbos davening was the extent of the relationship, but it was complete and undivided, whole and wholehearted. The time spent together was mine; it was for us.

Let me contrast this fifty years later to our technologically-advanced society. I was visiting my children and davened in one of the more popular minyanim in the area. Seven o'clock Shacharis is attended by many sixth-grade boys, since they do not daven in school. They have quality time davening with their fathers and even learn a few minutes together, either before or after davening, depending on the father's schedule. This would be great if the father was not busy checking his "texts" or "messages" or his pocket-hand-held office. During davening, it is Hashem that he is ignoring; during his designated time with his son, it is his child that he is ignoring. Are these the values we want to impart to our children? Need I say more?

And as for me, I have given you Shechem... which I took from the hand of the Emori with my sword and with my bow. (48:22)

Why did Yaakov Avinu notify Yosef that he "obtained" Shechem through the medium of his sword and his bow? Is there a significant lesson to be derived herein? Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, quotes the late Mashgiach of Beth Medrash Govohah, who opines that Yosef is actually teaching us the key to his success in life: he never gave up; he fought with all of his might, inching forward in his quest to overcome the enticements of the yetzer hora, evil-inclination. The yetzer hora was his mortal enemy and, as such, there was no room for compromise. Yaakov obtained Shechem by fighting for it. This was his life's story, because anything worth having is worth fighting for.

The Mashgiach quoted Horav Yeruchum Levovitz, zl, who taught that this is true concerning all of us. Even the great Torah scholar, the very righteous, are able to stumble and fall prey to the allurements of the evil-inclination. The yetzer hora is very crafty, and he can take down the most spiritually adept individual. In order for something to become our very own, one must contend for it. Even when one has begun to ascend the ladder of spirituality, his battle has not ended. Indeed, it is specifically at this juncture that he must wage an even more spirited struggle, because the yetzer hora is now roused and provoked to retrieve what it has lost.

Rav Nosson would often mention the Chovas Halevavos who comments on the "great war" which we carry on with the yetzer hora, who is unlike any other enemy. The usual foe gives up after losing a few battles. Realizing that continuing to battle will only increase his chances for defeat,

he throws in the towel and surrenders. Not so the yetzer hora, who never gives up, who seeks new and "more improved" ways to ensnare us in its tentacles. Every time is a new opportunity for triumph. It will never give up - neither should we. It is a battle from which we cannot rest. Rav Nosson was queried about how a person can live a life of constant readiness to do battle. Will one not "snap" from the tension? He replied, "If anything, he will crack from a state of quiescence." We do not realize the emotional and spiritual fracture created by boredom, resulting from too much tranquility.

Changing a middah, character trait, is a most difficult undertaking. Maintaining a good character trait, not allowing oneself to fall into the abyss that personifies the life of one who lacks character refinement, is not much easier. An individual is judged by his character traits, since they are the root, the origin of his actions. Yes, the one who is seemingly observant, but who lacks character refinement, is a flawed person. Likewise, one who is a baal middos, person of refined character, presents hope. He is someone that is reachable.

The individual whose middos are exemplary was not born that way. Perhaps he had a head start with family and environment, but without his constant struggle to maintain his good character, he would not be a baal middos tovos. In fact, middos is one area that serves as a dichotomy between human and animal. A baal middos is a human being. One who lacks good character traits is not a human being. He may have the appearance of a human, even, at times, speak as a human, but, for all intents and purposes, he is not much different from an animal.

One who is able to exert control over his middos is a powerful person. It takes tremendous self-control, born of inner-strength, to exert mastery over one's middos. The blessings which such a person gives to others have unusual efficacy, because they emanate from the mouth of a very unique person. Rav Zilberstein relates that a young man who had been married for a number of years - and had yet to be blessed with a child - requested a blessing from Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita. Rav Chaim told him to seek out a person who controlled himself during an argument, suffering humiliation and pain, yet refusing to respond with anything negative. Such a person, whose self-control is exemplary, can bless with great efficacy. The young man later related to Rav Chaim that it was with great difficulty that he discovered such a person. He asked for his blessing, which he received. His wife subsequently gave birth to a healthy child.

Rav Zilberstein concludes with a story well-worth repeating, because it demonstrates the power of a baal middos. In addition, it shows the tremendous self-control one must have to achieve such an august position. The daughter of a distinguished Torah scholar in Bnei Brak was married for quite some time and had still not conceived. She had undergone many painful and difficult fertility tests and procedures, all to no avail. The frustration led to a sense of serious depression, as she began to accept her designated fate. As Lag B'Omer approached, the young woman's mother decided that she would travel to Meron and pray at the kever, grave, of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai for her daughter. Perhaps a mother's broken-hearted entreaty might make an impression. Her daughter decided to accompany her mother on the trip.

It was 10:00p.m., and mother and daughter set out for the bus station - in the company of thousands of others - to take the bus to Meron. After a while, they were able to obtain their seats on a bus. A woman, whom they did not know, sat down directly across from them. As the bus began to move, another passenger moved into their proximity. A man, who from all appearances seemed American, walked over to the seat occupied by this unknown woman and began to berate her: "You are sitting in my seat!" he screamed. She, of course, explained to him that he was mistaken; it was her seat, and she had been sitting there for a while.

The man was adamant. It was his seat, and he wanted it - now. The woman never raised her voice, despite the vitriol laced abuse he was pouring out at her. The man was clearly wrong, rude and impossible. This, however, did not seem to faze him. He wanted the seat, regardless of how much abuse it would take to obtain it. Passengers sitting in their proximity came over and pleaded with him to leave the woman alone - to no avail. He kept on screaming at her, "Why did you take my seat? Why do you not allow me to

sit down in my seat?" During this entire time, the woman never responded; she did not say a word, suffering her humiliation in silence. Finally, after the man had subjected the poor woman to another one of his tirades, she picked herself up and left the bus.

Those who witnessed this travesty were appalled by the man's behavior and astounded by the woman's reaction. How could a person sustain so much abuse and remain silent as if it did not occur? The bus moved on, and then the man, who was now ensconced in the woman's seat, began to experience waves of regret: "Why was I so cruel to that woman? What prompted me to be so callous towards her?" He went from passenger to passenger, explaining that he was not that kind of person. He was really a decent individual who was overtired.

The bus pulled into a rest area, and the passengers alighted. Meanwhile, other busses pulled in, and the rest area quickly began to fill with passengers on their way to Meron. The woman who was relating the story noticed that getting off another bus was the woman who had originally been on her bus. Apparently, as soon as she left the original bus, another one pulled in and she was able to obtain a seat. It was at that moment, upon seeing the woman, that the mother and daughter remembered what Rav Chaim Kanievsky had said concerning the type of person from whom to elicit a blessing. This woman clearly fit the criterion.

"I went over to her, together with my daughter," the woman said, "and I asked her if she would forgive the man for the hurt that he caused."

"Certainly," she replied. "I forgave him immediately."

"When I heard this," the woman continued, "I told her what Rav Kanievsky had said. She listened and motioned with her head in agreement. 'Will you bless my daughter? She has not yet been blessed with children,'" the mother asked. "I will be happy to bless her." She did, and, on Shevat 19, exactly nine months later, the daughter gave birth to a healthy son.

Sponsored in memory of our dear father and grandfather Harry Weiss Tzvi ben Yoel a"h by Morry & Judy Weiss, Erwin & Myra Weiss and Grandchildren, Gary & Hildee Weiss, Jeff & Karen Weiss, Zev & Rachel Weiss, Elie & Sara Weiss, & Brian "Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy"

From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org
To ravfrand@torah.org
Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand * Parshas VaYeichi

The Blessing of Not Following The Pattern of Generational Descent

In Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov blesses Yosef's children: "And he blessed them that day, saying: 'By you shall Israel bless, saying: G-d make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" [Bereshis 48:20] Our patriarch models the way future generations of Jews will bless their own offspring. The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel interprets this as referring to the appropriate blessing to give one's son on the day of his bris milah [circumcision], rather than as a reference to the blessing parents give their children on Friday night or on Yom Kippur eve. (Both are widely practiced customs.)

There is much discussion among the commentaries as to why Ephraim and Manasseh are the prototypes by which we bless our children in future generations.

In general, there is a concept of the degradation of the generations (yeridas haDoros) – the further we get away from Sinai the weaker we become spiritually. We are not what our parents were, the Torah scholars of today are not like the Torah scholars of one hundred years ago, the scholars of 100 years ago were not like those of 500 years ago, and so forth. The Talmud describes this inevitable rule: "If the prior generations were like angels then we are human, and if the earlier generations were human then we are like donkeys" [Shabbos 112b].

There is only one exception to this rule: Yaakov made Ephraim and Manasseh on par with Reuven and Shimon [Bereshis 48:5]. He declared them equivalent to the generation that preceded them. They were not merely like his grandchildren. They were like his children.

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel is highlighting the appropriateness of this

blessing on the the day of the circumcision. When we welcome our son into the covenant of the patriarch Avraham, and the new generation comes online, so-to-speak, the blessing that we give our children is exactly this -- that they not be on a lower level than ourselves but that they should hopefully be (at least) on the same level as their parents. Just as Ephraim and Menasseh were equivalent to the previous generation (Reuven and Shimon), so too may this son be equivalent to that of his father's generation and not experience Yeridas haDoros.

When Hashem Nixes "Plan A", Yaakov Implements "Plan B"

Later in the Parsha, the pasuk says, "And Yaakov called his sons and said: 'Gather, yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days.'" [Bereshis 49:1] Rashi elaborates that Yaakov wished to reveal that which would happen at the End of Days, but this knowledge departed from him and he then began speaking about other matters.

Millions of Jews over thousands of years have wondered about the End of Days. When will redemption come? Why did Yaakov wish to tell his children when the End of Days would come and why – if in the end was Yaakov unable to accomplish this – does the Torah need to mention it at all? Why was it so important for them to know the 'ketz' ('end')?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes that Yaakov had a terrible fear. His fear was that if the Jews would go down to Egypt and need to be there hundreds of years, they would give up hope. As the years and generations go by it is only natural for people to give up hope. When one gives up hope, one throws in the towel and ceases to maintain his Jewishness and his Jewish identity. This was Yaakov's mortal fear.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky uses this concept to explain the Medrash in Parshas VaYigash that before leaving Eretz Canaan Yaakov chopped down cedar trees planted by his grandfather Avraham and brought the wood with him to Egypt. Yaakov wanted his descendants to have – throughout the Egyptian exile – a tangible reminder of the "old country." Yaakov wanted them to have a tangible artifact to remind them of the "old grandfather," that would serve as a constant source of hope that those boards would one day yet house a holy Tabernacle, which would be a home for the Divine Presence in their midst on the way back to their homeland.

So too, Yaakov's agenda in revealing to his children the whole of Jewish history was to give them encouragement not to give up hope in the darkest of times and to have faith that the end would be bright. The Almighty however intervened and suppressed Yaakov's prophetic knowledge of this information. Hashem told him that if his sons would learn the extent and severity of the Jewish exile, they would indeed throw in the towel.

"Plan A" was nixed by Hashem, but what was "Plan B"? Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains that when the Patriarch called in his sons and started telling them who they are and about their strengths and weaknesses, he had an agenda. The agenda was to let them know that their descendants would each return to Eretz Yisrael and each one would fulfill a specific function (tachlis): "This is your job." He thereby gave his children a future to look forward to and a hope for a light at the end of the tunnel.

The prophet Zecharia used an expression "Asir Tikva" [Zecharia 9:12], meaning "a prisoner with hope". Without hope, one cannot survive. [Natan Sharansky was in solitary confinement in Russia for some 15 years. On the wall of his prison cell, he wrote the words "Asir Tikva." He was a prisoner, but a prisoner with hope. One who has hope can stand up to the KGB. Without hope, one will crumble.]

When "Plan A" of giving hope by revealing the End of Days was nixed by the Almighty, a "Plan B" was put into effect with the same ultimate goal. He told each of his sons what their future would be in Eretz Yisrael as part of Klal Yisrael. Each one received guidance towards his appropriate future contribution to the nation, commensurate with his own specific talents. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains: according to Yaakov Avinu, Klal Yisrael was not destined to be a uniform nation without differences of opinion amongst themselves. The Jewish people are not monolithic. We are not a single nation with one approach and one way of doing things. On the contrary, our destiny is to live together as 12 distinct tribes. We can each have our own opinions and approaches based on our own personalities. Moreover, when Yaakov Avinu called in his 12 sons; they

were all there at the same time. He did not talk to each son individually. Yaakov talked to each son in front of everyone else.

Yaakov Avinu did that for a reason – so that each son should know that each of his 11 brothers also has a role that fits in with the larger needs and destiny of the nation. The patriarch validated each of the different future jobs of his sons and wanted to make sure that all of them knew that none of them had the exclusive claim to being on the "correct path set out for them by the patriarch of the family". We are all part of a bigger group and we should respect the talents and strengths of each other and not try to usurp the individualized roles of one another or try to delegitimize the contribution of one another.

We may not always agree, but we should respect legitimate diverse opinions within Klal Yisrael. From his deathbed, Yaakov gave his sons the hope for such a destiny and the hope and aspiration that allowed them to survive the Egyptian exile.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

Parsha Parables

Stories & Anecdotes that Illuminate the Weekly Torah Portion and Holidays
Parshas Vayechi, 10 Teves 5771, Friday, December 17, 2010

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky,
Dean, Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore

This week's Faxhomily is dedicated in memory of Reb Menachem Yosef ben R' Eliezer ob"m, R' Emanuel Bluth, ob"m 9 Teves & Chava bas Yechiel Yitzchok ob"m, Eva Bluth, of blessed memory, 14 Teves

Affections - Effecting

This week's parsha highlights the personal blessings and observations that Yaakov imparts to each of his children, known as "Birkas Yaakov." But they were not carte blanche blessings. Some of the sons were given their blessings cloaked in rebuke, others painted with effusive praise. More importantly, each of the blessings was tailored according to the strengths and qualities - even weaknesses - of each individual tribe. Yaakov's prescience bestowed his vision of leadership that each son would impart to his descendants throughout Jewish history. Shimon and Levi were rebuked for their anger, as was Reuven for his hastiness. But Yaakov Avinu, gave them advice regarding how to channel their passions. Yehuda was praised for his leadership, as was Zevulun for his business acumen, and Naftali for his swiftness and dedication.

What troubles me is a simple grammatical expression used by the Torah at the culmination of the blessings. The Torah sums up the blessings with the words: כל-אלה שבטי ישראל שנים עשר וזאת אשר-דבר להם אביהם ויברך אותם איש אשר כברכתו ברך אדם All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them; each man, according to his blessing, (beirach osam) he blessed them." A simple question. If the Torah is telling us about the personalized blessings for each individual, shouldn't the Torah have used the singular expression, ending its sentence, each man, according to his blessing, (beirach oso) he blessed him"?

The Story

Recently, I heard a tale from renowned scholar and equally as popular inspirational lecturer, and storyteller Rabbi Fischel Schachter. Yankel Rosenberg, a 52 year old diamond cutter from Brooklyn, burst into a psychiatrist's office in full regalia. The doctor looked up at his sartorial splendor. The man was adorned in a French general's outfit from the early 1800s. Yankel's right hand was neatly tucked into under the left side of his royal blue jacket as he puffed out his chest and declared, "Allow me to introduce myself! I am Napoleon Bonaparte! I have just conquered most of Western Europe and have solidified my standing amongst the peasants. However, my dear doctor, I need your help with a matter of utmost concern!" The doctor looked up at the celebrated bicorn on the man's head and asked, "What seems to be the problem?" "The problem, doctor, is with Josephine." The man's face began to show his deep concern. "She thinks she's Mrs. Rosenberg!"

The Message

This last verse of summation is, in my opinion, a declaration that each of us is an individual and we must meld our unique qualities together in forming the nation known as Israel. Yaakov Avinu endowed each son with individualized, personalized blessings and

observations. The blessings focused on the strengths, even the weaknesses, of the particular son, and ultimately his tribe. But Yaakov was doing more; he was telling us that a particular individual's strength or weakness does not exist in a vacuum. Blessings bestowed on one individual or flaws in character not only affect one particular individual or even one group of Jews. Indeed the attributes of one are blessings or even troubles for us all. As one large body knows, when the heart is healthy it is a blessing for all the limbs. The great vision and understanding of one Jew can affect so many others, and thus the blessing to one is a blessing to the plural.

Of course, the flip side is also true and the delusions or foibles of one of us can adversely affect all the Mrs. Rosenbergs among us.

©2010 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Yeshiva of South Shore | 1170 William Street | Hewlett | NY | 11557

In honor of Ronald and Sonya Kringsman shetichyu Saadia and Sorala Kringsman and family Chaim and Ann Kringsman and family Tzvi and Hudi Kringsman and family Meyer and Sharon Weissman and family

From Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>
reply-To rav-kook-list+owners@googlegroups.com
To Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>
Subject [Rav Kook List]

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
Vayechi: Jacob's Superior Blessing

Before his death, Jacob blessed each of his sons. He blessed his beloved son Joseph with:

"Blessings of heaven above, blessings of the abyss lying beneath; blessings of plenty and children. The blessings of your father are superior to those of my parents, until the desired hills of eternity." (Gen. 49:25-26)

Why did Jacob claim that his blessings were better than those of his parents?
What did he mean by the phrase "until the desired hills of eternity"?

Vision of a Future World

The blessings of Abraham and Sarah were revealed in the miracles that God performed for them - a son born to them at an advanced age, Divine protection when Pharaoh kidnapped Sarah. Isaac and Rebecca were similarly blessed with miraculous intervention when dealing with the Philistine king Abimelekh.

Jacob prayed that his son should also be blessed with miraculous protection when needed. This is what he meant by "blessings of heaven above." However, Jacob stipulated that his blessings should be revealed within the context of the natural physical world. Thus, he emphasized that they should also be "blessings of the abyss lying beneath."

This is truly an amazing blessing, reflecting a higher level of spiritual influence. Unlike a miracle that disrupts the physical realm, Jacob prayed that the physical world itself will be elevated and uplifted.

In fact, Jacob's blessing is a vision of the World to Come. He foresaw a world beyond simple miracles, a world whose material boundaries are infinitely expanded. Thus, Jacob explained that his blessing was "until the desired hills of eternity." In other words, this vision belongs to a future world, a universe infinitely elevated and boundless.

(adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, p. 203)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

From Jeffrey Gross <jgross@torah.org>

reply-To neustadt@torah.org, genesis@torah.org

To weekly-halacha@torah.org

Subject Weekly Halacha - Parshas Terumah

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)

Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Receiving an Aliyah to the Torah * Part 2

A minimum of eight people – a Kohen, a Levi, five Yisraelim and an additional person for maf'ir – are called to the Torah every Shabbos morning. If a Kohen is unavailable, either a Levi or a Yisrael is called instead of him, but if a Yisrael is called instead of a Kohen, then a Levi can no longer be called after him. If a Levi is unavailable, then the same Kohen who was called for Kohen is called again. The process

The person being called should take the shortest possible route to the

himah so that there is no unnecessary delay. If all of the routes are equal in distance, he should ascend from the right side.⁵

Before reciting the blessing, the one receiving the aliyah should look inside the Torah to see where the koreh will begin reading. He then rolls up the scroll and recites Barechu followed by the first blessing. Alternatively, he may leave the scroll unrolled but should close his eyes while reciting Barechu and the blessing.⁷

After the reading is over, the sefer should be rolled up and the final blessing recited. The final blessing should not be recited over an open sefer even if one keeps his eyes closed.

The blessings must be recited loud enough so that at least ten men are able to hear them. The poskim are extremely critical of those who recite the blessings in an undertone.⁸

Who is called to the Torah?

While it is appropriate and preferable to call to the Torah only those who are God-fearing Jews who observe the mitzvos, when the need arises or for the sake of peace it is permitted to call even those who are lax in certain areas of mitzvah observance,⁹ as long as they consider themselves believers in Hashem and His Torah. But under no circumstances is it permitted to call non-believers to the Torah, for their blessings are not considered blessings at all. If absolutely necessary, it may be permitted to accord them honors that do not necessitate a blessing, e.g., hagbahah or gelilah.¹⁰

Most often the aliyos are allocated in rotating order or at the gabbai's discretion. But it is a long-standing tradition which has become universally accepted to mark milestone events by receiving an aliyah. People marking such events are called chiyuvim, since custom dictates that they are obligated to receive an aliyah. Sometimes, however, there are not enough aliyos for all of the people who are chiyuvim.¹¹ Based on the opinion of the majority of the poskim, the following, in order of priority, is a list of the chiyuvim who are entitled to an aliyah:¹²

1. A groom¹³ on the Shabbos before his wedding [or on the Shabbos before he leaves his hometown to travel to his wedding].
2. A child¹⁵ who becomes bar mitzvah on that Shabbos.¹⁶
3. The father of a newborn¹⁷ boy or girl, if the mother is in shul for the first time since giving birth.¹⁸
4. A groom on the Shabbos after his wedding, if the wedding took place on Wednesday or later in the week.
5. One who has a Shabbos yahrtzeit.¹⁹
6. The father of a baby boy²⁰ whose bris will be that Shabbos or during the coming week.²¹
7. A groom on the Shabbos after his wedding, if his wedding took place before Wednesday.
8. One who has a yahrtzeit during the upcoming week.²²
9. One who must recite the ha-gomel blessing.²³
10. One who is embarking on or returning from a journey.
11. An important guest.

1 Some congregations add aliyos while others do not. Since both practices have a basis in halachah, each congregation should follow its own custom. It is preferable not to call more than eleven people altogether; Be'er Heitev 284:3, alluded to by Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 284:5.

2 Who can be a Kohen, Levi or Yisrael. Those congregations who add aliyos may also call a Kohen or a Levi for the last aliyah (called acharon), but should not call a Kohen or a Levi for any of the other additional aliyos; Mishnah Berurah 135:36-37.

3 O.C. 135:6.

4 O.C. 135:8.

5 O.C. 141:7.

6 A bachelor (who is not wearing a tallis) should put one on when receiving an aliyah on Shabbos or Yom Tov mornings, but he need not do so when receiving an aliyah at other times (Monday and Thursday or Rosh Chodesh, etc); Halichos Shlomo 1:12-20.

7 Mishnah Berurah 139:19. The third choice, which is to leave the sefer open but turn one's head to the left, is not recommended by the poskim, including the Mishnah Berurah.

8 O.C. 139:6. See Chayei Adam 31:12.

9 Preferably, they should be called only after the first seven aliyos; Pe'er ha-Dor 3, pg. 36 quoting an oral ruling from the Chazon Ish. See Yagel Yaakov, pg. 286.

10 Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:12, 21, 22.

11 A general rule is that members of a shul have priority over non-members, even if the non-member's level of chiyuv is greater than the member's.

12 This list covers the Shabbos Kerias ha-Torah only.

13 Who has not been married previously.

14 If both the aufruf and the bar mitzvah demand the same aliyah, then the one who is a greater talmid chacham has priority. If that cannot be determined, then the two should draw lots. Lots should be drawn whenever two chiyuvim lay equal claim to an aliyah.

15 The father of the child, however, is not a chiyuv at all; Sha'ar Efrayim 2:10.

16 According to some opinions, the same chiyuv applies even if the child became bar mitzvah during the past week; Rav C. Kanivesky (Ishei Yisrael, pg. 409).

17 Even if the baby was stillborn; Sha'arei Efrayim 2:5.

18 If the wife is not in shul, then the husband has an obligation to receive an aliyah when 40 days have elapsed from the birth of a male child, or 80 days from the birth of a female child.

19 A yahrtzeit chiyuv is only for a father or a mother. A yahrtzeit for a father has priority over a yahrtzeit for a mother; Kaf ha-Chayim 284:6.

20 A father who is naming a baby girl on Shabbos has priority over a father of a baby boy whose bris will take place during the week; Da'as Torah 282:7.

21 Some hold that if the bris will take place on Shabbos, then the father is a greater chiyuv than a yahrtzeit on that Shabbos; Ishei Yisrael, pg. 410.

22 If two people have yahrtzeit during the week, the one whose yahrtzeit is earlier in the week has priority; Kaf ha-Chayim 284:6.

23 Ha-gomel can be recited without an aliyah.

Weekly-Halacha, Weekly Halacha, Copyright © 2010 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org.

Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com

Shabbat Shalom <postmaster@ou.2dialog.com>

Thu, Dec 9, 2010

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org Cherishing Jewish Tradition Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The Jew who arrives early to the daily synagogue service will soon hear these words chanted:

“Ashreinu . . .

Happy are we, how good is our portion,

How lovely our fate, how beautiful our heritage.”

With these words, we express not only our allegiance to our tradition, but our enthusiasm for it. We do not only adhere to our mesorah, our heritage, but we cherish it.

Whereas the term “mesorah” can be defined narrowly, it has taken on a much broader definition over the course of Jewish history. In some ways, mesorah is almost synonymous with Torah. “Moses received the Torah at Sinai and [‘mesarah’] handed it on to Joshua.” Mesorah here refers to the core of our religion, that which was revealed at Sinai.

But the term mesorah has come to mean so much more, and it is this broader meaning that the siddur has in mind with those exultant words.

“Our portion, our fate, our heritage.” These words refer not only to the laws which are central to our religion, be they of Biblical or rabbinic origin, but to the entire corpus of Jewish practice: halachah, customs, both major and minor, mores, synagogue music, folklore, and gender relations. In its broadest definition, mesorah comprises our entire lifestyle.

It is thus possible to distinguish between core mesorah and peripheral mesorah, although it would be difficult, indeed, to reach consensus on what is core and what is peripheral. But both aspects are cherished components of a very ancient tradition whose roots trace back to a distant past.

From time to time, this tradition is challenged. All of it, most of it, or fragments of it come to be seen as obsolete, out of date, no longer relevant, perhaps even misguided. Can it be modified? Can mesorah be changed?

The tension between an unchanging tradition, with its hold over our sentimental natures on the one hand, and alluring innovations on the other, is an ancient one. Some would find the roots of this tension in the Biblical story of Korach. Perhaps it does go back that far. But only in the last two centuries, since the Enlightenment, has this tension become the central theme of the Jewish religious experience.

The continuity of mesorah and the degree to which it can be modified is a vast topic upon which volumes have been written. This brief essay will refer to the positions of two great rabbinic leaders.

Two Rabbis, Two Approaches

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known by the title of his masterwork, Chatam Sofer, struggled with this tension in the early nineteenth century. Similarly, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, first chief rabbi of the Land of Israel, faced this tension much later, when it took on an entirely new form.

The tension between an unchanging tradition, with its hold over our sentimental natures on the one hand, and alluring innovations on the other, is an ancient one. The Chatam Sofer confronted the growing strength of the Reform movement. He was faced with those who demanded relatively minor modifications in religious observance, as well as those who were ready to abandon much more essential Jewish

practices. His strategy in preserving the mesorah was a simple one: no compromise whatsoever. Borrowing a phrase from a specific halachic context, he asserted, “Chadash assur min haTorah; All that is new is prohibited.” He opposed modernization in all its forms.

The Chatam Sofer’s approach reflected his deep mistrust of the historical developments of his time that originated in non-Jewish sources. To him, all values had to stem from impeccably Jewish origins. Every deviation, no matter how slight, was to be vigorously opposed. Every proposed innovation, however innocuous it might seem, had idolatrous roots and would lead to serious transgressions. For the Chatam Sofer, not one iota of mesorah could be sacrificed. He used to say, “Let one thousand of my opponents be lost, but let not one jot or tittle of Jewish custom be dislodged from its place,” and, “Anyone who questions our norms and customs is suspect [of heresy].”

Was the Chatam Sofer correct in his approach? Was his strategy effective? Can “Chadash assur min haTorah” be applied to other historical circumstances?

For the answers to these questions, some look to the conduct of a rabbi who lived exactly a century later. Rav Kook faced a very different set of challenges in the early twentieth century, in what was then Palestine, the Holy Land. By that time, the ideas and principles of the Enlightenment were no longer new. Reform Judaism was an established movement. The challenge then was nationalist Zionism—the call to Jews to migrate to the Land of Israel and found a Jewish state. The “modernity” of the early nineteenth century was replaced by twentieth-century concepts and values: the power of science and technology to affect the future of mankind; the theory of evolution and its implications for belief in God; psychoanalysis and its view of human nature; the political philosophies of nationalism, communism, socialism, and liberal democracy. How could these forces for change be confronted and accommodated?

Rav Kook coined his own slogan to epitomize his approach: “Hachadash yiskadesh, vehakadosh yischadesh; the new will become sacred, and the sacred will be renewed.” Rav Kook accepted some of the new developments. He passionately embraced the pioneers whose return to the Holy Land was motivated by a thoroughly secular nationalism. He was open to Western art, literature and philosophy. He was not averse to adopting modern administrative techniques in running his rabbinic office. His openness to innovation is even evident in his poetic writing style.

It would be naïve and overly simplistic, however, to see the Chatam Sofer as a rigid rejectionist and Rav Kook as a liberal humanist. In fact, the Chatam Sofer also wrote poetry.

Every student of his magisterial and voluminous responsa knows full well how exquisitely sensitive he was to the needs of those in difficulty, irrespective of their level of religious observance. He raised funds for diverse charities of which all sorts of Jews were beneficiaries, without discrimination. And his support for settling the Land of Israel, in the limited form it took in his day, is legendary. Those familiar with his responsa are also well aware of his ability to be astoundingly lenient in his halachic decisions.

Rav Kook, for all his openness to novelty and for all his tolerance—some would even say excessive tolerance—of modernity, was vigorous in his defense of mesorah. In a letter he addressed to the “Jewish communities and individuals in the United States of America and Canada,” in 1923, he refers to those “who are ready to destroy God’s vineyard and to forsake the Lord and His true teachings.” He speaks of the changes within the structure of communal life in general and in the traditional form of service. He calls modifications of “hallowed customs and usages handed down to us by generations gone” evil, and is concerned that “one bad step leads to another.”

Rav Kook draws from his wide-ranging erudition to quote numerous sources, confirming his position that “customs adopted by our forefathers are to be considered integral parts of our Torah laws.” He concludes, “There is no ground whatsoever to treat lightly the customs of our sacred forefathers, and certainly not in matters of public conduct that are founded on the basic sanctity of the Jewish people.”

Mesorah’s Intrinsic Value

The contemporary Orthodox Jew faces today—perhaps in an unprecedented way—the conflict between living a life adhering to the mesorah and living a life adhering to a modern, or even post-modern, worldview and lifestyle. How is he or she to reconcile this conflict?

To answer this question, I would like to make some observations.

Firstly, there is intrinsic value to continuity and to tradition. The traditions of our ancestors helped guarantee that they would survive the vicissitudes of Jewish history. The complex combination of adhering to practical habits, maintaining attitudes of hope, clinging to a community, gaining inspiration from worship, and finding meaning in a consistent daily regimen is known as mesorah. And it is precisely those elements of Jewish life that have resulted in each and every one of us being here today. Mesorah, whatever else it may be, has proven to be of immense practical value to the Jewish people. It should not be frivolously rejected. The fashions and fads of the passing moment hardly possess the promise of ensuring a Jewish future for posterity.

Secondly, mesorah is not just a cultural hodgepodge of practices accumulated over the ages in a variety of Diaspora settings. Rather, every important component of

mesorah reflects some basic Jewish value. There are overarching concepts in our religion under which specific halachot and minhagim are subsumed. The custom of keeping yom tov sheni, for example, in spite of our contemporary certainty regarding the accuracy of our calendar, underscores the fundamental distinction between the Holy Land and the lands of the Diaspora, upon which our religion insists.

Every halachic practice, every minor custom, expresses, in some way, a meta-principle of our faith. Even playing dreidel, it has been argued, is part of our mesorah. On Chanukah we celebrate the Divine Providence that acts independent of the odds that favor the mighty and the many over the weak and the few. In dreidel play, we enact a contrasting view of life, one that prevails when we are left to our own devices without God’s hashgachah—life as a game of chance, in which blind odds rule and randomness prevails.

One way to view mesorah is as an intricate network of behaviors expressing the higher values of our faith. Sometimes these behaviors convey these values in explicit and very obvious ways. Other times they only do so implicitly. Sometimes a custom directly reflects an eternal value, and sometimes it only does so symbolically.

Viewed this way, mesorah is so much more than a system of traditional practices that can be easily modified. Rather, mesorah is the exquisitely nuanced, intricately complex system through which the loftiest values of our religion can find expression. The Chatam Sofer knew this; hence his ardent opposition to all that was new. Rav Kook knew this too, but he strove to see how the new behaviors of which he was skeptical might nevertheless express ultimate Jewish values. But he, too, knew full well that every Jewish custom, particularly in community and in synagogue life, was of cosmic religious significance and far too important to be tampered with arbitrarily. These considerations are among those which must be taken into account today, as we cope with attempts to “improve” or “advance” our mesorah.

This article originally appeared in Jewish Action Magazine WINTER 2010/5771 – Volume 71, No. 2. For more articles, click Jewish Action Magazine or visit: http://www.ou.org/jewish_action

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, PhD, a talented teacher, writer and orator, currently serves as Executive Vice President, Emeritus of the Orthodox Union and is scheduled to speak at the OU2011 National Convention One Day Conference on Jewish Life, January 16th.