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from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <[ravadlerstein@torah.org](mailto:ravadlerstein@torah.org)>  
to: [mchochmah@torah.org](mailto:mchochmah@torah.org)  
date: Thu, Dec 24, 2015 at 10:05 AM

**Meshech Chochmah**

Parshas Vayechi

by **Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein**

Lethal Davening

I have given you Shechem – one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorites with my sword and my bow.  
Meshech Chochmah: Onkelos changes “my sword” and “my bow” to tzalusi / my prayer and ba’usi / my supplication. These prayer-words are not synonyms. They reflect two entirely different modes of conversation with HKBH.

Tzalusa refers to our fixed prayer, which is structured, and obeys a given form. In all such fixed prayer, i.e. the shemonah esreh that we daven three times daily, we must precede our list of requests with praise of Hashem, and follow it with thanks. If we tamper with the fixed content or even the formulas that express it, halachah tells us that we have not fulfilled our obligation.

Ba’usa, on the other hand, is free-style. It pops up even where you might not expect it. The gemara[2] allows for it, for example, even within the structure of our fixed prayer. If we wish to innovate, we may add our own thoughts and prayers within each berachah of shemonah esreh, so long as our innovation is related to the specified topic of that berachah. What we say and how we say it, however, remains our choice. There are no givens. We can formulate our autonomous prayer any way we wish.

The two modes could not be more different. Our fixed prayer is part of our designated avodah, our service of Hashem. While kavanah enhances the performance of any mitzvah, it can still be minimally fulfilled simply with the intent to perform Hashem’s commandment. Our fixed prayer is not so different. Minimal intention suffices to at least fulfill the requirement of prayer, namely, kavanah in the first berachah, and a very limited degree of kavanah thereafter.

Personal, optional prayer is subject to stricter demands. To be effective, it requires full focus and attention, and knowledge of the meaning of the

words. (This might be the intention of the gemara[3] that a person’s prayer is heard only if he places his heart in his hands. In other words, he needs to fully direct his heart to Hashem.)

Our fixed prayer revolves around the community, the tzibbur. It is best said together with others; the language is that of the group, not the individual. The gemara points to a seeming contradiction between prayer that is said to be unacceptable without full sincerity and that which is accepted despite shortcomings. The solution, claims the gemara,[4] is that the latter applies to group prayer, to the tzibbur. The point is that the group davening is our fixed, established prayer, which is not as demanding of kavanah as the prayer of the individual.

We now understand why Yaakov spoke of his davening specifically as “sword” and “bow.” He wished to accentuate the differences between the modes of prayer. The blade of a sword is inherently dangerous. It requires very little effort to cause great damage. Simply grazing it can be injurious, even fatal.

Arrows are quite different. They are as potent as the force applied to the bow-string, no more and no less. The arrows are as deadly as the effort put into them. Yaakov attributed his military victory over the city of Shechem (against great odds, and in standing up to the counterattacks of Shechem’s neighbors and allies) to the success of both modes of davening in which he engaged.

The gemara[5] praises the potency of the Shema recited on one’s bed before nodding off. It speaks of it not only as a sword, but as a double-edged one. The moments in which a curtain of sleep falls over a person are not well-suited for focus and kavanah. The Shema is recited as a formula, not with a great surfeit of concentration. The gemara therefore underscores that it, too, is part of our daily avodah, and therefore blessed with potency, even when lacking in kavanah.

[1] Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bereishis 48:22 [2] Avodah Zarah 8A. See Eichah 3:41 [3] Taanis 8A [4] Loc. cit. [5] Berachos 5A

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from: Kol Torah Webmaster <[webmaster@koltorah.org](mailto:webmaster@koltorah.org)>

to: Kol Torah <[koltorah@koltorah.org](mailto:koltorah@koltorah.org)>

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[From previous 2 weeks and this week.]

**Emunah – An Introduction – Part One**

by **Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

Emunah, belief in Hashem and the divine origin of the Torah, is rather straightforward and can be explained in five minutes or less. In fact, Charlie Harary does a fine job setting forth this belief in a five minute video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dv2PgYw2W7g>. Let us briefly set forth his points.

The Truth of Hashem and Torah – Basic Arguments

Our connection with Hashem is compared in Shir HaShirim (as understood by Chazal; see, for example, Rashi’s commentary to Shir HaShirim) to a groom and bride[1]. Charlie Harary builds on this idea and notes the obvious point that a relationship is possible only if the parties choose to be in the relationship. Since Hashem desires a relationship with us, He affords us the choice to enter a relationship with Him.

For this reason, Hashem cannot make His presence blatant and obvious, since this would not leave us the choice as to whether to enter the relationship or not. If Hashem would announce to us one morning, “hello, here I am,” we would be left with no choice other than to acknowledge Him[2]. Therefore Hashem chooses to hide and challenges us to discover him and pronounce “Hinei Zeh Omeid Achar Kotleinu Mashgiach Min HaChalonot Meitzitz Min HaCharakim,” “Here He is, standing behind our wall, peering through the lattice work” (Shir HaShirim 2:9).

On the other hand, Hashem must make it possible for us to discover Him in order for there to be a relationship between us and Hashem. Thus, Hashem hides Himself, but not to the extent that we are unable to find Him. In Parashat Ha’azinu (Devarim 32:11) Hashem is described as being “KeNesher Ya’ir Kino Al Gozalav Yerachef,” like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young. Rashi (ad. loc.) explains that Hashem is “Nogei’a VeEino Nogei’a,” He touches but does not touch. Hashem hovers above us making Himself known in a subtle and less than obvious manner. However, His presence is able to be discerned by all if even just a minimal amount of thought is devoted to the matter.

Charlie Harary notes three portals through which we can recognize Hashem. The first is through nature. Mr. Harary expresses the point very well – we know how the body works but we are challenged to ask why it works so well. There are millions of parts of the body and they are all “in synch.” Could this just be a matter of chance, he asks? We should ask the same with the entire world. Why do all the billions and billions of parts all work together? Is this a product of chance as well?

The same, he notes, can and should be said regarding the history of the Jewish People. How could such a relentlessly persecuted people not only survive but even thrive? How could the state of Israel survive living among a sea of hostile neighbors bent on its destruction? It is an ongoing sixty-eight year Chanukah miracle of the many in the hands of the few, right before our eyes[3]!

Finally, Hashem revealed Himself not to an individual but to an entire nation of our ancestors. This stands in stark contrast to every other belief-system in the world.

Recognizing Hashem - Tevi’at Ayin vs. Simanim

Thus, if belief in Hashem and His Torah is so obvious, why then is there a need for an extended discussion of Emunah in Kol Torah? In order to answer this question, we cite Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik’s analysis presented in his magnificent work Abraham’s Journey, pages 29-31. Rav Soloveitchik notes that anyone who studied the second chapter of Bava Metzia (Eilu Metzoi’ot) knows that there are two means of identifying an object. One is to describe the item by signs or marks, known as Simanim. The other means of identification of an object is from a general impression of its form without knowing its marks. This type of recognition, called Tevi’at Ayin, is triggered by the apprehension of the configuration or of the whole item as such.

Rav Soloveitchik also notes the following:

“Halacha considers general recognition to be far superior to identification by naming marks. Configurative recognition is solid, a certainty....Identification by Simanim is not instantaneous; it consists in an act of inferring: the object belongs to me because I know the mark that is characteristic of this object. If it were not mine how would I know this mark? Of course, there are two possibilities: either I saw the object before, or there are two objects with the identical characteristics. The decision by the court to accept the sign as a piece of evidence is based on probability and statistics. However, identification based upon a general impression of the configuration or the whole is spontaneous, instantaneous.”

Rav Soloveitchik concludes: “Recognition of God is an art in itself. It is a double one: by Simanim and by Tevi’at Ayin[4].”

Many of us come to recognize Hashem through Tevi’at Ayin. It can come through the venues presented by Charlie Harary. It can also come from recognizing the grandeur of Torah[5] by recognizing that the profundity of Torah is compared to all other disciplines. For example, anyone who had the

pleasure of hearing a Shiur Kelali (lecture on a broad topic) delivered by Rav Aharon Lichtenstein or by his student Rav Michael Rosensweig recognizes the greatness of Torah. In the words of my Torah Academy of Bergen County colleague Rav Raphi Mandelstam, a devoted student of Rav Rosensweig, “Hearing Rav Rosensweig delivering an extended in-depth Shiur in which he ties together all the various and nuanced aspects of a Sugya (Talmudic topic) is like experiencing the revelation of Torah at Har Sinai.” Anyone who studies Rav Soloveitchik’s majestic Shiurim LeZeicher Abba Mori Z”l can relive the Ma’amad Har Sinai experience that attendees of his great Yahrtzeit Shiurim felt.

In describing the sources of his faith, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, (“The Source of Faith is Faith Itself”) beautifully writes of his Tevi’at Ayin experience:

“The greatest source of faith, however, has been the Ribbono Shel Olam Himself....Existentially, nothing has been more authentic than the encounter with Avinu Malkeinu, the source and ground of all being. Nothing more sustaining, nothing more strengthening, nothing more vivifying. The encounter, of course, has been varied. In part it has been channeled – primarily through Talmud Torah (this is no doubt an aspect of the ‘Ma’or Shebah,’ the light within it, of which Chazal[6] spoke) but also through Tefilah and the performance of Mitzvot; or if you will, by the halachic regimen in its totality. In part, it has been random – moments of illumination while getting on a crowded bus or watching children play in a park at twilight. Obviously, it has been greatly varied in intensity. In its totality, however, whatever the form and content, it has been the ultimate basis of spiritual life[7].”

Nonetheless, despite the superiority of a Tevi’at Ayin type of recognition of Hashem and His Torah, the Gemara (Chullin 60b) presents an example of identification by Simanim. The Gemara presents this point as a response to those who deny the divine origin of the Torah. However, such Simanim may also deepen and broaden the belief of those who already intuitively recognize Hashem and the divine origin of the Torah.

Conclusion

We will, God willing, outline the various Simanim which can help us strengthen our relationship with Hashem in next week’s issue.

[1] The relationship between Hashem and the Jewish People is a recurring theme in Torah literature. Hoshel’a Perek 2 is an excellent example.

[2] Meshech Chochmah (to Shemot 19:17) thus explains Chazal’s assertion (Shabbat 88a) that we were coerced to receive the Torah at Sinai. This is a difficult statement in light of the fact that Sefer Shemot (Perakim 19 and 24) record that we chose to accept the Torah. Rather, Meshech Chochmah explains, the fact that Hashem revealed Himself so starkly at Sinai rendered choice impossible and it was as if we were coerced to receive the Torah at Sinai. The Gemara continues and explains that we later accepted the Torah out of choice during the time of Achashveirosh. This certainly fits with Meshech Chochmah’s idea. Only when Hashem reveals Himself in a subtle manner, as exemplified by Megillat Esther, do we enter into an authentic relationship with Hashem.

[3] When asked why, for all his skepticism, he still believed in God, Voltaire (cited in Rav Dr. Walter Wurzbarger’s God is Proof Enough, p. 62) replied: “Had it not been for the miracle of the survival of the Jewish People, I would have given up this proof as well.”

[4] A full, eloquent and moving articulation of recognition of Hashem by Tevi’at Ayin is presented by Rav Dr. Walter Wurzbarger, a leading student of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in his work God is Proof Enough. A more brief but very compelling presentation of Emunah generated by Tevi’at Ayin is Rav Aharon Lichtenstein’s beautiful essay “The Source of Faith is Faith Itself” printed in Jewish Action 53:1 (Fall 1992) and Tradition 47:4 (Winter 2014). Rav Lichtenstein is the leading student of Rav Soloveitchik.

[5] Referred to by Rambam (Hilchot Isurei Biah 21:32) as the recognition of the crown of Torah. The ignorant Jew, writes Rambam, is not acquainted with the crown of Torah. One of the most important, if not the most important, goals of Jewish educators is for their students to acquire the appreciation of the crown of Torah.

[6] Eichah Rabbah, Petichta 2.

[7] In this essay, Rav Lichtenstein writes that his Rebbei’im serve as great sources of inspiration to him in his belief in Hashem and Torah. As a Talmid of Rav Lichtenstein, it is difficult to express the depth of the impact he has had on me and thousands of others in bolstering our faith. Rav Lichtenstein was a role model and pillar of faith for those who had the privilege to, to use a Biblical phrase, sit in his shadow. Rav Lichtenstein’s depth of commitment and spirituality was breathtaking. His deep devotion to Torah was simply incredible. Most of all, the fact that this great man had emerged as a superstar from Harvard University and was totally devoted to Torah serves as an inspiration for anyone who has any doubts about Hashem and our Torah. Since Rav Lichtenstein believed, it must be true. Since a man with such brilliance, vast Torah and secular knowledge, integrity, dignity, kindness and morality believed, it must be true.

## Emunah – an Introduction – Part Two by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

### Introduction

In last week's issue, we introduced a wide variety of sources which can help us identify the role Hashem plays in our lives. We continue that discussion in this issue.

### Simanim to Bolster the Tevi'at Ayin

It is very gratifying to hear from many believing Jews, even many practicing rabbis, who very much enjoy our writings on Emunah. They felt that the writings strengthened their faith in Hashem and Torah, as they added to their Tevi'at Ayin recognition of Hashem. Adding Simanim to their basis of Tevi'at Ayin based Emunah enriched their faith.

An example from our writings will help illustrate this point. God-conscious individuals find it intuitive that God's hand was involved in Israel's establishment, the Six Day War and the Entebbe Raid. One need not have a thorough knowledge of these events to arrive at these conclusions. However, a careful examination of these events, to which we have devoted a number of Kol Torah articles, strengthens and confirms the Tevi'at Ayin recognition of the miracle.

### Why Some Do Not Believe – Noise Drowning Out the Kol Demamah Dakkah

Every human being is naturally inclined to believe in God. Hashem has opened the door and given the capacity[1] for everyone to believe in Him. Rav Soloveitchik (Abraham's Journey p.31) expresses the point eloquently: How does one recognize the Almighty? At times we meet Him on the street. He greets us first, as is written, "Peace, peace to him that is far off and to him that is near, says the Lord" (Yeshayahu 57:19).

The Meshech Chochmah[2] (commentary on Shemot 19:17) adds that "the Jewish soul is naturally inclined with an intense desire to fulfill God's will." If that is the case, then why do some who were raised in observant families and provided with a reasonable level of Jewish education choose to discard belief and Torah observance?

I gained insight into this phenomenon during an inspection of the Scarsdale Eiruv in 2015. We were walking on a busy and loud street and my cell phone rang repeatedly. I failed to hear the ring since the ring of my mobile telephone is subtle.

Hashem, in Melachim I Perek 19, presents Himself to Eliyahu HaNavi as a "Kol Demamah Dakkah," a subtle and still voice. Hashem tells this to Eliyahu HaNavi after the latter demanded that Hashem reveal Himself in an absolute and indisputable manner at Har HaCarmel to motivate the Jews of Northern Israel to return to His service. Eliyahu HaNavi even goes so far as to blame Hashem for these Jews' lack of faith, due to His failure to provide sufficient evidence of His presence (Melachim I 18:37)[3].

Hashem responded and proved His existence beyond a shadow of a doubt, and the Northern Jews responded "Hashem Hu HaElokim, Hashem Hu HaElokim[4]" (18:39). However, these Jews' newly acquired faith quickly dissipated (see Malbim to Melachim I 19:2), and Eliyahu HaNavi ran away to Sinai in deep despair. Hashem then encountered Eliyahu and told him that Hashem is not made apparent through a fire, earthquake or hurricane; rather, Hashem appears through a subtle and quiet voice.

When Hashem appears in an obvious manner that does not involve any human effort, the impact is fleeting. As the Mishnah (Avot 5:21) teaches, "LeFum Tza'ara Agra," "the reward is commensurate with the effort invested." Therefore, Hashem explains to Eliyahu, He interacts with the world in a subtle manner in order to require that an effort be made to discover Him. When people invest in the quest for the divine, the impact has the potential to last. Hashem told Eliyahu that the way to bring people closer to God is not by performing overt miracles, but rather by training people to appreciate the Kol Demamah Dakkah of Hashem.

Although parents and teachers may have invested themselves in a student in an effort to teach him to discern and respond to Hashem's Kol Demamah Dakkah, such efforts do not automatically bear fruit. Sometimes, various noises drown out the Kol Demamah Dakkah, just as my cellular phone's soft ringtone was drowned by the noise on a busy Scarsdale street. The noises that drown out the Kol Demamah Dakkah may be external negative influences such as a spiritually impoverished environment that is deaf to the call of the Almighty, or it might be internal noise pollution which overshadows the subtle and still voice of Hashem. These may include unrestrained passions, desire for (a misleading) independence from the Halachic discipline and God, or lingering and unresolved psychological tension created by a variety of traumatic situations.

The return of those who have strayed depends primarily on them. Hashem reaches out, but people sometimes ignore Him. However, as we say in Ashrei thrice a day, "Karov Hashem LeChol Kore'av LeChol Asher Yikra'uhu VeEmet," which teaches that Hashem is close to those who sincerely reach out to Him (Tehillim 145:18). Hashem will respond to man, but only if man takes the first step: "Hashem is good to those who yearn for Him, to the soul that seeks Him" (Eichah 3:25). Hashem says to us, "Open for Me an opening as narrow as the eye of the needle and I will open for you gates as wide as the entrances of palaces" (Midrash Rabbah Shir HaShirim 5:2). All the articles and arguments in the world will not convince someone to connect to Hashem and Torah

unless he is willing to take the first step and eliminate the noise which creates a barrier between him and the Kol Demamah Dakkah.

A comparison may be made to physical exercise. Those of us who make time to exercise know that once one makes a commitment, momentum will cause one to naturally be drawn to exercise and embrace the experience. Hashem has created within us the ability to love exercise due to His concern and love for us. He wants us to take care of our bodies so He made it enjoyable to do so. However, one has to take the first step and make that effort.

Rav Lichtenstein ("The Source of Faith is Faith Itself") writes that "The motto I inscribed in my college notebook was David's plea: Tuv ta'am vada'at lamdeni key b' mitzvotcha he'emanti ["Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I have believed in Your commandments," Tehillim 119:66]. Answers, I of course continued – and continue – to seek, and have found many." Rav Lichtenstein took the first step and constructively dealt with his questions and concerns about Torah.

Everyone else can make the same choice. Everyone can experience and encounter God as did Rav Lichtenstein. But it remains one's choice to filter out the noise and be receptive to the Kol Demamah Dakkah[5].

### Is Emunah More Difficult in the Contemporary Era?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emet LeYa'akov to Shemot 7:22) brilliantly resolves the contradiction between Rambam (Peirush HaMishnayot to Avodah Zarah Perek 4), who rejects belief in Sheidim (demons), and the Gemara, which makes fairly frequent mention of Sheidim with the assumption that they exist. Rav Kamenetsky cites Kohelet (7:14), which teaches that "Zeh LeUmat Zeh Asah HaElokim," meaning that Hashem creates a level playing field for Emunah.

Therefore, at a time when His presence is quite apparent, he must make a counterpart in order that we have a choice to believe[6]. Hence, during the time of the Gemara, when Hashem revealed Himself with a Bat Kol (heavenly voice) and other miracles recorded in the Gemara, Hashem introduced a spiritual counterweight of Sheidim to challenge us. However, in the time of Rambam, when such miracles ceased, there was no need for Hashem to introduce counterbalances such as Sheidim[7].

Undoubtedly, it was easier to feel God's presence in pre-modern times. Rabbi Dr. Haym Soloveitchik eloquently describes this phenomenon in his widely read essay "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy" (Tradition 28:4):

"God's palpable presence and direct, natural involvement in daily life—and I emphasize both 'direct' and 'daily'—, His immediate responsibility for everyday events, was a fact of life in the East European shtetl, so late as several generations ago. Let us remember Tevye's conversations with God portrayed by Sholom Aleichem.....

The world to which the uprooted [from the European shtetls] came, and in which their children were raised, was that of modern science, which had reduced nature to "an irreversible series of equations," to an immutable nexus of cause and effect, which suffices on its own to explain the workings of the world. Not that most, or even any, had so much as a glimmer of these equations, but the formulas of the "new country" had created a technology which they saw, with their own eyes, transforming their lives beyond all dreams. And it is hard to deny the reality of the hand that brings new gifts with startling regularity.

There are, understandably, few Tevyes today, even in haredi circles. To be sure, there are seasons of the year, moments of crest in the religious cycle, when God's guiding hand may be tangibly felt by some and invoked by many, and there are certainly occasions in the lives of most when the reversals are so sudden, or the stakes so high and the contingencies so many, that the unbeliever prays for luck, and the believer, more readily and more often, calls for His help. Such moments are only too real, but they are not the stuff of daily life. And while there are always those whose spirituality is one apart from that of their time, nevertheless I think it safe to say that the perception of God as a daily, natural force is no longer present to a significant degree in any sector of modern Jewry, even the most religious. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that individual Divine Providence, though passionately believed as a theological principle—and I do not for a moment question the depth of that conviction—is no longer experienced as a simple reality. With the shrinkage of God's palpable hand in human affairs has come a marked loss of His immediate presence, with its primal fear and nurturing comfort. With this distancing, the religious world has been irrevocably separated from the spirituality of its fathers, indeed, from the religious mood of intimate anthropomorphism that had cut across all the religious divides of the Old World[8]."

### Conclusion

We will, God Willing, continue with an analysis of Rav Dr. Haym Soloveitchik's insight. We will note how Hashem has created new and varied opportunities for Emunah to counterbalance the phenomena Rav Dr. Soloveitchik has outlined.

[1] However, Hashem does not coerce us to believe in Him, as that would ruin the legitimacy of His relationship with us.

[2] The Meshech Chochmah bases his assertion on the celebrated teaching of Rambam (Hilchot Geirusin 2:20) that every Jew fundamentally wishes to observe the Torah but is swayed from doing so only due to the influence of his Yeitzer HaRa (evil inclination). Rambam's source appears to be the Gemara (Niddah 30b) which tells us that when a child is in the womb it is taught the entire Torah, and at birth it forgets it all. This Gemara teaches us that Hashem implants a natural love of and inclination to Torah into every Jew.

[3] See Berachot 31b for the Gemara's criticism of Eliyahu HaNavi's demand.

[4] We echo these statements on Yom Kippur, since one can reach the same level of certitude regarding Hashem's existence through the intense religious experience of Yom Kippur even without witnessing a violation of the laws of nature such as those which occurred at Har HaCarmel.

[5] One of the most important lessons and precious gifts that a parent can give his children is to teach them to be open to experience and discern Hashem's presence in our lives. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Yoreh Dei'ah 3:76) writes that parents should teach their children about Emunah at a very young age. I vividly recall my mother's telling me at a very young age that Hashem judges us on Rosh HaShanah. My mother believed this phenomenon to be as real as the walls in our house, and she succeeded in the transmission of this intense belief to her children.

[6] As we explained earlier, if there is no choice to believe, then we cannot have a two-way relationship with Hashem.

[7] This is also the deeper meaning behind the encounter between Rav Ashi and Menasheh (Sanhedrin 102b) in which Menasheh tells Rav Ashi that had Rav Ashi lived during his times, he would have run after idolatry. During an era when the presence of God was very intensely felt, the pull to Avodah Zarah was much greater, in order for service of Hashem to be challenging and therefore a choice.

[8] Rav Dr. Soloveitchik concludes his essay by observing the following:

"It is this rupture in the traditional religious sensibilities that underlies much of the transformation of contemporary Orthodoxy. Zealous to continue traditional Judaism unimpaired, religious Jews seek to ground their new emerging spirituality less on a now unattainable intimacy with Him, than on an intimacy with His Will, avidly eliciting Its intricate demands and saturating their daily lives with Its exactions. Having lost the touch of His presence, they seek now solace in the pressure of His yoke."

### **Emunah – an Introduction – Part Three by Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

#### **Introduction**

We concluded last week's issue with a quote from Rav Dr. Haym Soloveitchik's essay entitled "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," which explained that our generation faces many new difficulties regarding Emunah. We will continue our discussion by outlining how in the modern age Hashem has introduced new and varied opportunities for Emunah to counterbalance the phenomena Rav Dr. Soloveitchik has outlined.

#### **Modern Advents which Should Promote our Emunah**

In pre-modern times, medicine was primitive, which made one very vulnerable and dependent on God. Today, with the advent of modern medicine, man does not feel so dependent on Hashem. Thus, it is not surprising that Jews in the East European Shtetl would wail on Yom Kippur and most pious Jews do not do so nowadays.

Moreover, the temptation to sin is far greater today than it was only fifteen years ago. Severe violations of the Torah, with which spiritually corrosive impacts come, are accessible with one click of a computer mouse. Although such activities are self-destructive and against one's long term interests, the short term attraction is great.

Nonetheless, Shlomo HaMelech's principle of "Zeh LeUmat Zeh Asah Elokim" discussed in last week's essay very much holds in our time. Despite the enormous spiritual challenges of modernity which we face, we have been given an equally great degree of spiritual opportunities. Most prominently, the survival and thriving of the State of Israel presents boundless spiritual opportunities. As we mentioned earlier, the very survival of Israel constitutes an ongoing sixty-eight year long Chanukah miracle of the few against the many. Moreover, whereas only a century ago a visit to the Kotel HaMa'aravi was experienced only by a privileged few amongst our people, today it is almost routine for observant Jews to connect with this very holy space many times during their lives. Moreover, Biblical predictions of the Jews' mass return to their homeland after years of exile of being scattered across the four corners of the world have been fulfilled.

Archaeological findings abound that confirm very significant sections of the Tanach, as Rav Amnon Bazak summarizes in chapter six of his masterful work Ad HaYom HaZeh (available in English at the website of Yeshivat Har Etzion <http://etzion.org.il/en/topics/fundamental-issues-study-tanakh?combine=&page=1>). Evidence of King David was found at Tel Dan in the early 1990's, which disproved the assertions of secular scholars who had insisted for decades that King David was a matter of legend. The archaeological discoveries are ongoing, as just in August 2015, a huge gate was found in the ruins of the ancient Pelishti city Gat (as reported at <http://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/goliath-gate-archaeologists-uncover-entrance-biblical-city-gath-n404016>; Golyat came from the city of Gat), which entirely supports the Biblical text. Only three weeks ago the seal of King Chizkiyahu was discovered in Ir David excavations.

Rav Bazak also includes in this work (chapters one through five) a culmination of over a century of Orthodox responses to Biblical criticism. In the past, some thought that Biblical criticism has demolished educated belief in the literal truth of the Bible. However, there have been more than a century of sustained, effective, and convincing traditional responses to Bible criticism, beginning with Rav David Zvi Hoffman and Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, continuing with Professor Umberto Cassuto and Dr. Benno Jacob, followed later by the Da'at Mikra commentary to all of Tanach and Rav Mordechai Breuer. Rav Bazak's work is the culmination of this effort, and it represents an intellectual death sentence to Biblical criticism.

The discovery in the 1960's of evidence supporting the Big Bang theory confirmed the Biblical insistence that the world had a beginning. These discoveries challenged scientists who had, since the time of Aristotle, insisted that the world is eternal. Dr. Robert Jastrow famously remarked about this phenomenon (God and the Astronomers, 1978, p. 116; p. 107 in 1992 edition):

"For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

The most important development, though, might be the magnificent spiritual opportunity offered by study of modern science. Rambam writes in Hilchot Yesodei Torah 2:2 (translation from [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)):

"What is the path [to attain] love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify [Him], yearning with tremendous desire to know [God's] great name, as David stated: 'My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living God' [Psalms 42:3].

When he [continues] to reflect on these same matters, he will immediately recoil in awe and fear, appreciating how he is a tiny, lowly, and dark creature, standing with his flimsy, limited, wisdom before He who is of perfect knowledge, as David stated: 'When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers... [I wonder] what is man that You should recall Him' [Psalms 8:4-5]. Based on these concepts, I will explain important principles regarding the deeds of the Master of the worlds to provide a foothold for a person of understanding to [develop] love for God, as our Sages said regarding love: 'In this manner, you will recognize He who spoke and [thus,] brought the world into being.'"

The study of science affords the opportunity for a rich religious growth in love and awe of the Creator. I found the study of college level biology to be one of the most poignant religious experiences of my life. From the complexity of a simple organism such as the E. coli to the grandeur of the structure of the human eye, a sensitive soul soars in spiritual ecstasy at the marvels of the Creator, which are revealed by modern science.

Only a few decades ago, Reform and Conservative Judaism dominated the American Jewish scene. Today the movements are disintegrating (see, for example, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4488219,00.html>), which demonstrates once again that Orthodoxy is the only expression of Judaism that withstands the test of time.

The bottom line is that despite the many challenges posed by modernity, its spiritual opportunities are great.

#### **Conclusion**

This Kol Torah article series, as well as the preceding and following series, is intended to enrich the belief in Hashem and Torah of its readers. However, the most effective means to promote belief in Hashem is the public proper behavior of observant Jews. When Orthodox Jews behave in a peaceful, moral, and productive manner to the broader society, its behavior serves as the most compelling evidence of the divine origin of the Torah. When Orthodox Judaism is identified with not only ritual observance such as Kashrut and Shabbat but also with honest business, well-mannered driving, and contributions to the broader society, belief in Hashem and His Torah are confirmed and enhanced.

Yeshayahu (43:10) teaches that we are Hashem's witnesses and that Hashem should be glorified by us (60:21). These are the mission statements of our people which challenge us to lead proper, fulfilling, and enjoyable lives which live up to the Torah's ideals. Following these mission statements serves as the most compelling evidence that the Torah is the divine plan which best outlines human conduct.

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

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com  
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**Vayechi**

The conclusion of the book of Bereshith reaches its climax this week with the recording for us of the death of our father Yaakov and of Yosef. The era of the founders of our people ended in relative tranquility and contentment, albeit on foreign soil. It will be a long and arduous journey for the descendants of Yaakov to return home to the Land of Israel.

A dark and forbidding era is about to begin but, though still in the future, it was foretold already many years earlier to our father Avraham. From the simple meaning of the words of the Torah, it is apparent that the family of Yaakov found themselves comfortable and well settled in their home in Goshen.

The promise of Yosef that the Lord would take them forth from Egypt was certainly remembered and passed on from one generation to the next. Nevertheless there was no sense of immediacy regarding this promise and its fulfillment, and the Jews would view Egypt as their home rather than the Land of Israel for a long time.

They hastened to return home after burying Yaakov in the Cave of Machpela, seeing Egypt as their home and the Land of Israel as a far distant goal and dream that would somehow eventually be realized but that had no immediate bearing on their day-to-day living.

This attitude remained constant throughout the long history of the Jewish people and of its various exiles, in Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Europe and today the entire world, outposts that have hosted and still host the Jewish people in our far-flung diaspora. The Jewish people were never in a hurry to leave any of these places and to return to the Land of Israel. This still seems to be the case in our time as well.

It is difficult to understand why the holy family of Yaakov seems so passive and unresponsive in relation to the Land of Israel. There are commentators who state that they were aware of the heavenly decree that they would have to be strangers in a strange land for many centuries and that they accepted their lot and decided to make the best of it under the circumstances.

However, as Maimonides points out regarding the Egyptian enslavement of the Jewish people, Egypt was not preordained to be the oppressor and enslaver of Israel. And, it was also apparently not preordained that those early generations of Jews living in Egypt were to fulfill the vision of Avraham to be strangers and slaves in a land that did not belong to them. Apparently according to Maimonides the Egyptians had a choice as to whether to enslave the Jews, and the Jews before their enslavement occurred had an equal choice of leaving Egypt and returning to their ancestral home in the Land of Israel.

However we will deal with this baffling issue, there is no question that this represents a template for all later Jewish exiles and for Diaspora Jewry in all times and places. Apparently only tragedy moves the Jewish people...and throughout our history tragedies abound. Let us hope that somehow history does not repeat itself in our time as well.

Shabat shalom

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From: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org  
reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org  
subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU  
**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org**  
**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column**  
**Vayechi - "The Yoke's On Us"**

We all have received blessings at one time or another. We have certainly received compliments. Over the course of time, we learn that sometimes the compliments are clearly flattering. But occasionally, ambiguous statements are made to us, leaving us confused and unable to determine with certainty whether we are being complimented or insulted.

There are statements which leave us with no such doubts. Suppose someone called you a "donkey?" Would you think he was flattering you? What if, as if to remove any shadow of doubt, he went further and asserted that you are a "thick-boned donkey?" I wager that you would come out fighting.

In this week's Torah portion, Parashat Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26), our forefather Jacob calls one of his sons, Issachar, just that—a "thick-boned donkey." Surprisingly, not only does Issachar not take umbrage at his father's description, but he remains quite convinced that his father is not just complimenting him but is blessing him.

Our Sages take things even further. For them, Jacob's calling his son a donkey is his way of expressing a prophetic prediction: Issachar's descendants will have a prestigious role in Jewish history. They will become our people's supreme Torah authorities.

Why would a loving father, foretelling a glorious future for his son Issachar, choose such a bizarre metaphor to describe him? Admittedly, Jacob compares some of his other sons to a variety of animals. But those sons were no doubt quite pleased to be designated "majestic lions" (Judah), or "lovely fawns" (Naphtali). Even Dan and Benjamin could, albeit perhaps grudgingly, come to terms with being likened to "a serpent by the road" or "a ravenous wolf." But "a large boned donkey?" Issachar could not be blamed for finding that overly offensive.

Our commentators insist that Issachar found Jacob's choice of the term "donkey" inoffensive. Indeed, they consider it an apt metaphor for Issachar's special qualities. To understand this, we must study the full text of words of the blessing that Jacob granted to Issachar:

"Issachar is a thick-boned donkey,  
Crouching down between the sheepfolds.  
For he saw a resting place that was good,  
And the land that it was pleasant;  
He bent his shoulder to the burden,  
And became a toiling serf." (Genesis 49:14-15)

Jacob knew all of his sons quite well. He discerned their unique strengths and did not suppress his criticisms of their weaknesses. He insightfully recognized Issachar's special qualities: While Issachar intuitively realized he didn't have the leadership talents of Judah or the reckless courage of Simon and Levi, he was an idealist who set strong goals for himself, even in his early youth and he understood that in order to achieve those goals, he would have to persevere tenaciously over the course of long years; he was willing, even eager, to do so. He accepted the yoke of hard work and the burden of sustained effort.

Knowing Issachar well, Jacob chose to compare his characteristics to those of the donkey. With this comparison, he was both blessing Issachar with success, and he was complimenting him for his willingness to bear any burden and to even toil as a lowly serf in order to attain his lofty goals: a "resting place" and a "pleasant land."

Just as Jacob chose the metaphor "donkey" to best capture Issachar's diligence, so did he select the term "menucha (resting place)" to symbolize Torah and the world of menucha which it engenders. And so did he use the phrase "pleasant land" to refer to the land that Jacob so cherished, the Land of Israel.

Intellectual mastery of Torah and remaining loyal to its ideals is a formidable challenge. Such mastery and such loyalty demand kabbalat ol malchut shamayim vekabbalat ol mitzvot, an acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and an "acceptance of the yoke of the mitzvot. For Jacob, Issachar's stubborn willingness to submit to those yokes was best captured by the image of the "thick-boned donkey."

Steadfast commitment is not only a prerequisite for a life of religious menucha, of Torah. It is also required in order to possess the Holy Land, cultivate it, and protect it. Both Torah and the Land require that same stubborn commitment. The donkey willing to submit to its burden is also the perfect symbol for a people committed to building and defending Eretz Yisrael.

The Targum (or Aramaic) translation of the Bible, written by the ancient sage Onkelos, treats the last phrases of the verses quoted above in a dramatic and almost shocking manner. The words "he bent his shoulders to the burden and became a toiling serf" are rendered by Onkelos as follows:

"He will vanquish the lands of the nations, defeat their inhabitants, and those that survive will serve him and pay him tribute."

Thus, the "thick-boned donkey" conjures up diverse images for our Sages. The best known view sees Issachar bent under the burden of Torah study until he finally becomes the model Talmudic sage. The Midrash sees the donkey as akin to the early Zionist chalutz (pioneer), who persists in his mission of settling the arid desert, causing it to

flower, and protecting it from marauders. For Onkelos, the donkey is the symbol of the Jewish soldier, stubbornly holding on to every inch of the hotly contested battlefield. Among my favorite twentieth century rabbinic writers was a man named Elimelech Bar-Shaul, a former rabbi of Rehovot, who passed away exactly fifty years ago. In a collection of his sermons entitled *Min HaBe'er*, he agrees that the stubbornness of the “thick-boned donkey” is needed for achieving both Torah prowess and sovereignty over the Land of Israel. But he goes further and writes:

“Just as Torah study must be refreshed and renewed constantly, so does our appreciation of the Land of Israel require renewal. Torah cannot be taken for granted; neither can the Holy Land. We must continuously deepen our love for the Land of Israel, just as our Torah study must always strive for greater depth. Each morning, we must be newly impressed by Torah, and with every dawn, we must appreciate our land anew.”

Rabbi Bar-Shaul coined a phrase that has remained with me ever since I first encountered it soon after his premature demise: He wrote, “The Rabbis speak of the ol Torah, the yoke of Torah. There is also an ol Eretz Yisrael, the yoke of the Land of Israel.”

Issachar is the archetype of the one who bears both the burden of Torah and the burden of the Land of Israel. He submits to both yokes. It might be difficult for the rest of us to feel comfortable with the title “thick-boned donkey.” But we must at least understand that this title is a symbol of our stubborn submission to the twin yokes of Torah and Israel.

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org**

**Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

***On Not Predicting the Future***

Jacob was on his death-bed. He summoned his children. He wanted to bless them before he died. But the text begins with a strange semi-repetition: “Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.” (Gen. 49:1-2)

This seems to be saying the same thing twice, with one difference. In the first sentence, there is a reference to “what will happen to you in the days to come” (literally, “at the end of days”). This is missing from the second sentence.

Rashi, following the Talmud,[1] says that “Jacob wished to reveal what would happen in the future, but the Divine presence was removed from him.” He tried to foresee the future but found he could not.

This is no minor detail. It is a fundamental feature of Jewish spirituality. We believe that we cannot predict the future when it comes to human beings. We make the future by our choices. The script has not yet been written. The future is radically open.

This was a major difference between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. The Greeks believed in fate, moira, even blind fate, ananke. When the Delphic oracle told Laius that he would have a son who would kill him, he took every precaution to make sure it did not happen. When the child was born, Laius nailed him by his feet to a rock and left him to die. A passing shepherd found and saved him, and he was eventually raised by the king and queen of Corinth. Because his feet were permanently misshapen, he came to be known as Oedipus (the “swollen-footed”).

The rest of the story is well known. Everything the oracle foresaw happened, and every act designed to avoid it actually helped bring it about. Once the oracle has been spoken and fate has been sealed, all attempts to avoid it are in vain. This cluster of ideas lies at the heart of one of the great Greek contributions to civilization: tragedy.

Astonishingly, given the many centuries of Jewish suffering, biblical Hebrew has no word for tragedy. The word *ason* means “a mishap, a disaster, a calamity” but not tragedy in the classic sense. A tragedy is a drama with a sad outcome involving a hero destined to experience downfall or destruction through a character-flaw or a conflict with an overpowering force, such as fate. Judaism has no word for this, because we do not believe in fate as

something blind, inevitable and inexorable. We are free. We can choose. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily said: “We must be free: we have no choice!” Rarely is this more powerfully asserted than in the *Unetaneh tokef* prayer we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even after we have said that “On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed ... who will live and who will die”, we still go on to say, “But teshuvah, prayer and charity avert the evil of the decree.” There is no sentence against which we cannot appeal, no verdict we cannot mitigate by showing that we have repented and changed.

There is a classic example of this in Tanakh.

“In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, ‘This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.’ Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people: This is what the Lord, God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.’” (2 Kings 20:1-5; Isaiah 38:1-5) The prophet Isaiah had told King Hezekiah he would not recover, but he did. He lived for another fifteen years. God heard his prayer and granted him stay of execution. From this the Talmud infers, “Even if a sharp sword rests upon your neck, you should not desist from prayer.”[2] We pray for a good fate but we do not reconcile ourselves to fatalism.

Hence there is a fundamental difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. A prophet delivers not a prediction but a warning. He or she does not simply say, “This will happen”, but rather, “This will happen unless you change.” The prophet speaks to human freedom, not to the inevitability of fate.

I was once present at a gathering where Bernard Lewis, the great scholar of Islam, was asked to predict the outcome of a certain American foreign policy intervention. He gave a magnificent reply. “I am a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is *passé*.” This was a profoundly Jewish answer.

In the twenty-first century we know much at a macro- and micro-level. We look up and see a universe of a hundred billion galaxies each of a hundred billion stars. We look down and see a human body containing a hundred trillion cells, each with a double copy of the human genome, 3.1 billion letters long, enough if transcribed to fill a library of 5,000 books. But there remains one thing we do not know and will never know: What tomorrow will bring. The past, said L. P. Hartley, is a foreign country. But the future is an undiscovered one. That is why predictions so often fail.

That is the essential difference between nature and human nature. The ancient Mesopotamians could make accurate predictions about the movement of planets, yet even today, despite brain-scans and neuroscience, we are still not able to predict what people will do. Often, they take us by surprise.

The reason is that we are free. We choose, we make mistakes, we learn, we change, we grow. The failure at school becomes the winner of a Nobel Prize. The leader who disappointed, suddenly shows courage and wisdom in a crisis. The driven businessman has an intimation of mortality and decides to devote the rest of his life to helping the poor. Some of the most successful people I ever met were written off by their teachers at school and told they would never amount to anything. We constantly defy predictions. This is something science has not yet explained and perhaps never will. Some believe freedom is an illusion. But it isn't. It's what makes us human.

We are free because we are not merely objects. We are subjects. We respond not just to physical events but to the way we perceive those events. We have minds, not just brains. We have thoughts, not just sensations. We react but

we can also choose not to react. There is something about us that is irreducible to material, physical causes and effects.

The way our ancestors spoke about this remains true and profound. We are free because God is free and He made us in His image. That is what is meant by the three words God told Moses at the burning bush when he asked God for His name. God replied, Ehyeh asher Ehyeh. This is often translated as "I am what I am," but what it really means is, "I will be who and how I choose to be." I am the God of freedom. I cannot be predicted. Note that God says this at the start of Moses' mission to lead a people from slavery to freedom. He wanted the Israelites to become living testimony to the power of freedom. Do not believe that the future is written. It isn't. There is no fate we cannot change, no prediction we cannot defy. We are not predestined to fail; neither are we pre-ordained to succeed. We do not predict the future, because we make the future: by our choices, our willpower, our persistence and our determination to survive.

The proof is the Jewish people itself. The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is engraved on the Merneptah stele, inscribed around 1225 BCE by Pharaoh Merneptah IV, Ramses II's successor. It reads: "Israel is laid waste, her seed is no more." It was, in short, an obituary. The Jewish people have been written off many times by their enemies, but they remains, after almost four millennia, still young and strong.

That is why, when Jacob wanted to tell his children what would happen to them in the future, the Divine spirit was taken away from him. Our children continue to surprise us, as we continue to surprise others. Made in the image of God, we are free. Sustained by the blessings of God, we can become greater than anyone, even ourselves, could foresee.

[1] Rashi to Gen. 49:1; Pesachim 56a; Bereishit Rabbah 99:5. [2] Berakhot 10a.

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](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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From: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)>  
reply-to: [ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org),  
to: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org)  
subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayechi  
Menuchas HaNefesh Comes With A Sense Of Accomplishment**

The bracha to the Tribe of Yissocher contains the pasuk: "And he saw menucha [relaxation] that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer." [Bereshis 49:15]. There seems to be somewhat of a contradiction in this pasuk, which renders it difficult to understand. The pasuk begins by saying that a person views relaxation (menucha) as a positive phenomenon (ki tov) and ends by saying, "he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured servant." Normally we would not expect someone who found relaxation pleasant to want to be an indentured servant! What is the pasuk really saying?

I believe that the simple interpretation of the pasuk is that there are two types of 'menucha'. When we talk about 'menucha' we can be speaking of the type of relaxation that a person gets on a vacation. We go somewhere where it is warm and sunny. We have no responsibilities there to worry about. We sit there in a hammock drinking a cold glass of lemonade. We read a book or newspaper. We 'space out' and just sway with the gentle breezes of the hammock. One feels, for a while, "Ah, this is menucha, there is nothing greater than this." It makes for a great vacation.

However, as incomprehensible as it may seem, a person becomes tired of this after a while. After a while, a person feels very empty. This is because a person has something inside of him called a nefesh [soul] and that nefesh

needs to be sustained. The only thing that sustains the nefesh is a spiritual component. This is alluded to by the pasuk in Koheles [6:7] "All man's toil is for his mouth, yet his wants are never satisfied (v'gam haNefesh lo timaleh). A person's soul longs to have a relationship with spirituality. It wants to have some sense of accomplishment. Even in the secular world, people have ambitions. They want to accomplish something with their lives. If a person is just "on vacation" all the time and does not really accomplish anything, he feels a sense of emptiness. That is what motivates people to do things. It comes from a person's neshama, their nefesh</em>.

When a person in fact uses his talents to accomplish his goals, there is a tremendous menucha [self-satisfaction; peace of mind] associated with that. It is called "menuchas hanefesh" [serenity of the soul]. A person does not get this serenity on vacation but rather he gets it when he senses that he is using the talents that the Master of the World gave him to do something and make a difference in this world.

This is the menucha that is spoken of in the bracha to Yissocher. "He saw menucha that it was good" refers to the menuchas haNefesh that a person gets when he does something with his G-d given talents and gets the sense of serenity and peace of mind that comes with knowing he has accomplished something important with his life.

The Zohar writes on this pasuk that the expression "he saw menucha that it was good" refers to the Written Torah and the expression "and the land that it was pleasant" refers to the Oral Torah. Finally, the Zohar continues, the expression "and he bent his shoulder to bear the burden" refers to the toil involved in studying Torah. Yissocher's descendants sat on the Sanhedrin. They were the teachers of Torah, in a certain sense. The Tribe of Yissocher perceived the studying of Torah and the teaching of Torah throughout Klal Yisrael to be their lot in life. This was their mission in the world.

As a result, "they put their shoulder to the burden" – they took on the burden that they saw as their life's calling with enthusiasm and commitment. When a person accomplishes his life's calling, he has a tremendous sense of Menuchas HaNefesh. A person can be busy the entire day, but if he is doing what he wants to do, he does not mind it. He loves it. It gives him great satisfaction.

People make a big mistake. One of the great myths of life is something called retirement. People say, "I can't wait to retire. I can't wait to retire." We hear countless stories of people who retire and then say, "now what?" There is only so much time that one can read the newspaper in the morning. There is only so much golf that one can play. Then what? People are seriously in error by thinking that the best thing in the world is to be able to do nothing. Doing nothing is the worst thing in the world. It is debilitating. It is depressing.

Fine, "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," but this is only for a limited period of time. The true Menuchas HaNefesh that the Torah refers to here is the Menuchas HaNefesh that comes with the accomplishment of using one's talents. That is something that Yissocher saw and therefore bent his shoulder to accept upon it the burden of Torah study.

***One Does Not Abandon "Mama"***

Yaakov Avinu tells Yosef "When I came from Paddan, Rochel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was just a small measure of land to go to Efras; and I buried her there on the road to Efras, which is Beis Lechem" [Bereshis 48:7]. Rashi elaborates that Yaakov is justifying himself to his son, after having asked him to go through the effort of taking his remains back to Eretz Yisrael: "Don't think I was lazy and that is the reason I did not bring your mother Rochel to the Me'aras HaMachpelah for burial. I could have done it. You should know that it was based on Divine command that I buried her there, so that she should be of aid to her children when Nebuzaradan would exile them and they would pass through by way of her tomb, Rochel would go out on to her grave and weep and seek mercy for them. As it says, 'A voice is heard in the heights...' and the Holy One Blessed is He answers her 'There is reward for your act, says Hashem &hellip; and children shall return to their borders.' [Yirmiyahu 31:14-16]"

Rochel is referred to as "Mama Rochel". Klal Yisrael would cry out to their mother on their way to exile. Rochel would in turn cry out to the Almighty who would hear her cries and promise her that her children would ultimately return from exile.

In the autobiography of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, he tells the following very interesting story:

Rabbi Lau writes that he had a relationship with Yitzchak Rabin, the former Prime Minister of the State of Israel. He also writes that he once travelled to Cuba and met with the President of Cuba for 3 hours (between 2:00 am and 5:00 am, according to Castro's custom for meeting dignitaries). At the end of the meeting, Castro gave Rabbi Lau a box of Cuban cigars that he asked him to deliver personally to Yitzchak Rabin. Rabbi Lau returned to Israel, called up Rabin and told him he had a box of cigars from Fidel Castro for him.

Rabin told him he did not smoke cigars, only cigarettes, but at least it was an interesting story.

At any rate, Rabbi Lau writes that he was able, at least to a certain extent, to have an influence on Yitzchak Rabin on a crucial matter. When the State of Israel was negotiating one of their agreements with the Palestinians following the "Oslo Accords," the question came up regarding what should be done with Bais Lechem. Bais Lechem is of course a Palestinian city, but Kever Rochel is right there. In the agreement that they negotiated, the Israelis insisted that Kever Rochel remain under Jewish control.

There is a 500 yards long road from Gilo (the Jerusalem neighborhood closest to Bais Lechem) to Kever Rochel. The Palestinians were insisting that their soldiers control that road. In other words, Kever Rochel itself would remain under Israeli control but the Palestinians would control the road to it. Rabin signed off on this agreement. There was much concern in certain Israeli circles that if control of the road would be given to the Palestinians, it would not be safe to travel to Kever Rochel.

Rabbi Lau met with Rabin and told him, "I know you do not like to renege on an agreement, but you must insist that Israel retains control of the road and can guarantee safe access for Jews to Kever Rochel. Rabin, who was a secular Jew, could not understand all the fuss about Rochel's burial site. Rabbi Lau told him – "It is because Rochel is our Mama and one does not abandon his mother!"

These words of the Chief Rabbi moved Rabin, and at the following Sunday's cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister announced his revised position on the matter. It was because of this moving plea of Rabbi Lau "One does not abandon his mother" that until this day Jews still have access and still come to cry and pray in large numbers at Kever Rochel, a short distance away from Bais Lechem.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>

to: Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>

subject: [Rav Kook List]

mailing list: rav-kook-list.googlegroups.com

#### **Rav Kook List**

#### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

#### **Vayechi: Jacob's Sword and Bow**

”וַאֲנִי נִתְתִּי לָךְ שָׁכָם אֶחָד עַל אֶחָד, אֲשֶׁר לְקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֱמֹרִי, בְּחַרְבֵי וּבִקְשָׁתַי.”

Before his death, Jacob gathered his sons together and blessed them. To his beloved Joseph, Jacob promised an additional portion - "which I took from the Amorites with my sword and bow" (Gen. 48:22).

It is striking just how out of character this statement is for Jacob. Jacob was the "ish tam," the scholarly man who dwelled in the 'tents of Torah.' Jacob was the one who greeted his angry brother with gifts, not with battle. Jacob was the one who cursed his sons for slaughtering the residents of Shechem after they kidnapped his daughter. So what is this talk of swords and bows?

The Sages interpreted his statement as referring - not to weapons of war - but to weapons of prayer:

"Does it not say, 'I do not trust in my bow, and my sword will not save me' (Psalms 44:7)? Rather, 'my sword' refers to prayer. And 'my bow' (be-kashti) refers to supplication (bakashah)." (Baba Batra 123a).

Is this just a homiletical interpretation of Jacob's curious pronouncement?

What do swords and bows have to do with prayer?

#### **Preparing for Prayer**

Thousands of years ago, a sect of especially pious individuals, known as the chasidim rishonim, lived in the Land of Israel. The Mishnah records their practice of meditating for a full hour before each prayer. They would not begin to pray until they knew that "their hearts were fully directed toward their Father in heaven" (Mishnah Berakhot 5:1).

What kind of meditative techniques did these chasidim rishonim use?

Rav Kook suggested that Jacob's 'sword' and 'bow' are mental tools used to ready oneself for prayer. These weapons represent methods to clear one's thoughts and refine one's mental images in preparation for a pure experience of prayer.

"The meditative method which utilizes the refined visualization of ha-shlilah ha-gedolah ('the great negation') - necessary in order to cleave to the light of the Ein Sof - this technique purifies all of life's forces. It raises them above all lowly, mundane qualities. It also elevates all that is associated with the individual who meditates using yichudim (mystical unifications), as he reflects on this profound thought with all the depths of his spirit and soul, with spiritual clarity and elevation."

The 'sword' is thus a technique by which one slashes and cuts away all erroneous thoughts, pruning away all limiting concepts of God. This is the "great negation." We reject the idolatrous defining of the Infinite and Unlimited, and gain awareness of the all-encompassing light of the Ein Sof. And what about Jacob's 'bow'? This refers to focus and concentration. As Rav Kook continues:

"Prayer which is based on this lofty yearning is saturated with pure inspiration. It scores its mark like a bow and arrow of a champion archer. 'With my sword and bow' – 'with my prayer and supplication.'"

Thus the 'bow' is a metaphor for a state of mental focus during prayer. The imagery is taken from the practiced art of an expert archer, who takes careful aim before releasing the arrow. In fact, the Hebrew word for intention - kavanah - literally means 'to take aim.'

This is a quality of pure Divine service which Jacob was able to free from the idolatrous influence of the Amorites - "with my sword and bow."

(Adapted from Shemonah Kevatzim II: 198. Orot HaKodesh vol. IV, p. 448)  
Comments and inquiries may be sent to: [mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com](mailto:mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com)

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[subscribe@yeshiva.org.il](mailto:subscribe@yeshiva.org.il)

#### **By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

#### **How Many Should be Saying Kaddish?**

*Since, in Parshas Vayechi, we read of Yaakov Avinu's last instructions to his children, this is an appropriate week to discuss some of the laws of kaddish.*

**Question:** Is it better that each mourner recite only one *kaddish*, or that all the mourners recite all the *kaddeishim*?

**Answer:** Most people are under the impression that whether the "mourner's *kaddish*" (*kaddish yasom*) is recited by only one person or whether many recite it simultaneously is a dispute between the practices of Germany and those of Eastern Europe. However, we will soon see that this simplification is inaccurate. There were many communities in Eastern Europe where *kaddish* was said by only one person at a time, and this was the universal *Ashkenazic* practice until about 250 years ago.

The custom that many people recite the mourner's *kaddish* simultaneously was accepted and standard *Sefardic* practice (meaning the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East), going back at least to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (see *Siddur Yaavetz*, comments after *Aleinu*), although when this custom was

instituted is uncertain. But before we explore the issue of whether more than one person may say *kaddish* simultaneously, let us first examine the origins of reciting the mourner's *kaddish* altogether.

### Origins of *kaddish*

Although the *Gemara* refers to *kaddish* in numerous places (*Brachos* 3a, 57a; *Shabbos* 119b; *Sukkah* 39a; *Sotah* 49a), it never mentions what we call *kaddish yasom*, the *kaddish* recited by mourners, nor does it recommend or even suggest, anywhere, that a mourner lead the services. The *Gemara*, also, makes no mention of when *kaddish* is recited, with the exception of a very cryptic reference to *kaddish* recited after studying *aggadah* (see *Sotah* 49a). A different early source, *Masechta Sofrim*, mentions recital of *kaddish* before *borchu* (10:7) and after *musaf* (19:12). The fact that the *Gemara* says nothing about a mourner reciting *kaddish* or leading services is especially unusual, since the most common source for these practices is an event that predates the *Gemara*. The *Or Zarua*, a *rishon*, records the following story: Rabbi Akiva once saw a man covered head to toe with soot, carrying on his head the load that one would expect ten men to carry, and running like a horse. Rabbi Akiva stopped the man, and asked him: "Why are you working so hard? If you are a slave and your master works you this hard, I'll redeem you. If you are so poor that you need to work this hard to support your family, I'll find you better employment."

The man replied, "Please do not detain me, lest those appointed over me get angry at me."

Rabbi Akiva asked him: "Who are you, and what is your story?"

The man answered: "I died, and everyday they send me like this to chop and carry these amounts of wood. When I am finished, they burn me with the wood that I have gathered."

Rabbi Akiva asked him what his profession was when he was alive, to which he answered that he had been a tax collector (which, in their day, meant someone who purchased from the government the contract to collect taxes) who favored the rich by overtaxing the poor, which the *Or Zarua* calls "killing the poor."

Rabbi Akiva: "Have you heard from your overseers whether there is any way to release you from your judgment?"

The man responded: "Please do not detain me, lest my overseers become angry with me. I have heard that there is no solution for me, except for one thing that I cannot do. I was told that if I have a son who would lead the *tzibur* in the recital of *borchu* or would recite *kaddish* so that the *tzibur* would answer *yehei shemei rabba mevorach*... they would release me immediately from this suffering. However, I did not leave any sons, but a pregnant wife, and I have no idea if she gave birth to a male child, and if she did, whether anyone is concerned about teaching him, since I have not a friend left in the world."

At that moment, Rabbi Akiva accepted upon himself to find whether a son existed and, if indeed he did, to teach him Torah until he could fulfill what was required to save his father. Rabbi Akiva asked the man for his name, his wife's name, and the name of the town where he had lived. "My name is Akiva, my wife's name is Shoshniva and I come from Ludkia."

Rabbi Akiva traveled to Ludkia and asked people if they knew of a former resident, Akiva, the husband of Shoshniva, to which he received the following answer: "Let the bones of that scoundrel be ground to pulp."

When Rabbi Akiva asked about Shoshniva, he was answered: "May any memory of her be erased from the world." He then inquired about their child, and was answered: "He is uncircumcised -- for we were not interested in involving ourselves even to provide him with a *bris milah*!" Rabbi Akiva immediately began his search for the son, whom he located -- it turned out that he was already a young adult. Rabbi Akiva performed a *bris milah* on him and attempted to teach him Torah, but was unable to do so. For forty days, Rabbi Akiva fasted, praying that the child be able to study Torah, at which time a heavenly voice announced: "Rabbi Akiva, now go and teach him Torah!"

Rabbi Akiva taught him Torah, *shma*, *shmoneh esrei*, *birchas hamazon*, and then brought him to *shul* in order for him to lead the *tzibur* by reciting *kaddish* and *borchu*, to which the *tzibur* responded, *yehei shemei rabba mevorach le'olam ule'olmei olemaya* and "Baruch Hashem hamevorach le'olam va'ed."

At that moment, Akiva, the husband of Shoshniva, was released from his punishment. This Akiva immediately came to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and told him: "May it be Hashem's will that you eventually reach your eternal rest in *Gan Eden* -- for you have saved me from *Gehennom*." (This story is also found, with some variation, in the second chapter of *Masechta Kallah Rabasi*.)

### Other versions

When a different *rishon*, the *Rivash*, was asked about this story, he reported that it is not found in the *Gemara*, but perhaps its origin is in *Midrash Rabbah* or *Midrash Tanchuma*. He then quotes a story from the *Orchos Chayim* similar to that quoted by *Or Zarua*. In conclusion, the *Orchos Chayim* emphasizes that, for the twelve months of mourning, a mourner should recite the last *kaddish* of the *davening* and *maftir* on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, and lead the services for *ma'ariv* every *motza'ei Shabbos* (*Shu't Harivash* #115).

A similar story is recorded in an earlier *midrashic* source, the *Tanna Devei Eliyahu*, where the protagonist is not Rabbi Akiva, but his *rebbe's rebbe*, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai (see *Rambam*, *Peirush Hamishnayos*, end of the fifth chapter of *Sotah*). In this version, the man was punished until his son turned five and the son was educated to the point that he could answer *borchu* in *shul* (*Eliyahu Zuta*, Chapter 17). No mention is made of the son reciting *kaddish*. However, the *halachic* sources all quote the version of the *Or Zarua*, in which the protagonist of the story is Rabbi Akiva.

### Merits for the deceased

This story serves as the basis for the practice that a mourner lead the services and recite *kaddish*. Relatively little of this topic is discussed until the time of the *Maharil*, who was asked the following question:

"Should someone who is uncertain whether his father or mother is still alive recite *kaddish*?"

To this question, frequent in earlier times when cell phones were not so commonplace, the *Maharil* replied that he is not required to recite *kaddish* and he should assume that the person is still alive (*Mishnah*, *Gittin* 3:3). Once the parent reaches the age of eighty, one should view it as uncertain whether the parent is still alive. Upon this basis, I am aware of a *gadol be'yisrael* who had escaped Hitler's Europe before the war, who began to recite *kaddish* for his parents once the Nazis invaded the part of Russia where his parents were living.

The *Maharil* continues that if there are two people in *shul*, one who is reciting *kaddish* for a deceased parent, whereas the other is uncertain whether his parents are still alive, that the second person should not recite *kaddish*. This is because of the *halachic* principle of *ein safek motzi midei vadai*, someone who has a questionable claim does not preempt someone who has a definite claim or right -- in this instance, the person whose parents might still be alive should not recite *kaddish*, rather than someone whose parents are known to be deceased. We see from this ruling that the *Maharil* assumes that *kaddish* is recited by only one person at a time.

The *Maharil* explains that, for this reason, he himself did not say *kaddish* when he was uncertain whether his parents were still alive. He then explains that someone who is not sure whether his parents are still alive and is capable to lead the services properly should lead the services in honor of his parents (*Teshuvos Maharil* #36).

### Conclusions based on the *Maharil*

We see from the *Maharil's* discussion that:

Only one person recites *kaddish* at a time.

The reason that someone whose parents are alive should not recite mourner's *kaddish* is because he is taking the *kaddish* away from people who are mourners.

If there is no mourner present to lead the services, then the person uncertain if he is a mourner should lead services, if he can do the job properly.

#### **Obligatory versus voluntary kaddish**

The *Maharil* (*Shu't Maharil Hachadoshos* #28) was also asked how a minor can recite *kaddish* if it is a requirement, as only one obligated to fulfill a mitzvah may fulfill a mitzvah on behalf of others. The *Maharil* answered that the *kaddeishim* that are recited by the *shaliach tzibur* as part of davening cannot be recited by minors. These *kaddeishim* are obligatory and therefore must be recited by an adult, who thereby fulfills the mitzvah on behalf of the entire community. However, non-obligatory *kaddeishim*, such as *kaddish derabbanan* and the *kaddeishim* recited at the end of davening, may be recited by minors. As a curious aside, the *Mesechta Sofrim* (10:7) explains that these *kaddeishim* were established primarily as make-up for people who arrived late and missed the *kaddeishim* that are required.

It is interesting to note that, already in the time of the *Maharil*, people assumed that the mourner's *kaddeishim* are more important than the *kaddeishim* recited by the *chazzan*. The *Maharil* points out that this is incorrect, since the *kaddeishim* recited by the *chazzan* are required, and it is greater to perform a mitzvah that one is required to observe than one that is not required (*gadol ha' metzuveh ve'oseh mimi she'eino metzuveh ve'oseh*). The main merit that one performs for his deceased parent is to recite the *kaddeishim* that are said by the *chazzan* as part of davening. Since minors cannot serve as *chazzan*, the *Maharil* considers it a great merit that they receive *maftir*, which a minor may receive, since they thereby recite *borchu* in front of the *tzibur*.

#### **Mourner's kaddish on weekdays**

It appears from the *Maharil's* responsum that, prior to his era, *kaddish yasom* was recited only on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. In his day, a new custom had just begun in some communities to recite mourner's *kaddish* on weekdays. The reason for the new custom was to enable minors to recite *kaddish* on a daily basis and to accommodate adults whom the *tzibur* did not want to lead the services.

#### **Which kaddeishim should be said?**

The *Maharil* writes that although these *kaddeishim* are not required, but only customary, they should still be recited after a *shiur* is completed, after *bameh madlikin* is recited Friday evening, and after *pesukim* are recited, such as when we recite *kaddish* after *aleinu* and the *shir shel yom*. He rules that someone whose parents are still alive may recite these *kaddeishim*. However, if his parents do not want him to recite these *kaddeishim*, he should not.

#### **One at a time**

At this point, let us address our opening question: Is it better that each mourner recite only one *kaddish*, or that all the mourners recite all the *kaddeishim*?

It appears that, initially, whoever wanted to recite what we call today the mourner's *kaddeishim* would do so. Knowing the story of Rabbi Akiva, it became an element of competition, different people trying to *chap* the mitzvah, which sometimes engendered *machlokes* and *chillul Hashem*. To resolve this problem, two approaches developed for dealing with the issue. Among *Sefardim*, the accepted approach was that anyone who wanted to say *kaddish* did so, and everyone recited *kaddish* in unison. This practice is noted and praised by Rav Yaakov Emden in his commentary on the *siddur* (at the end of *Aleinu*). Among the *Ashkenazim*, the approach used was to establish rules of prioritization, whereby one person at a time recited *kaddish*.

These lists of prioritization are discussed and amplified by many later *Ashkenazi* authorities, thus implying that, in the *Ashkenazi* world, the early custom was that only one person recited *kaddish* at a time. We do not know exactly when the custom began to change, but by the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, several major *Ashkenazi* authorities, among them the *Chayei Odom* (30:7) and the *Chasam Sofer* (*Shu't Orach Chayim* #159; *Yoreh Deah* #345), discuss a practice whereby *kaddish* was recited by more than one person simultaneously. About this time, we find another custom in

some communities, in which the mourner's *kaddish* was said by only one person, but where everyone who chose could join in the recital of a *kaddish derabbanan* that was recited at the end of the daily morning prayer (see *Shu't Binyan Tziyon* #1:122), presumably after the *rav* taught a *shiur* in *halachah*.

#### **Merged community**

With this background, we can understand the following mid-nineteenth century responsum. A community had two *shullen* and several *shteiblach*. The main *shul* was in serious disrepair, so they made an agreement to close all the smaller *shullen* in order to pool resources and invest in one large, beautiful new *shul* and have no other *minyanim*. Included in this decision was a new *takkanah* that all mourners would now recite all the *kaddeishim* in unison. Subsequently, some individuals claimed that the community should follow the practice of the *Rema* and the *Magen Avraham* of prioritizing the recital of *kaddish* and have one person say it at a time. The community leaders retorted that this would create *machlokes*, since there was only one *shul* and many people would like to say more *kaddeishim* than they can under the proposed system. Apparently, the dispute even involved some fisticuffs. The community sent the *shaylah* to Rav Ber Oppenheim, the *rav* and *av beis din* of Eibenschutz. He felt that the community practice of having all the mourners recite *kaddish* together should be maintained, but first wrote an extensive letter clarifying his position, which he sent to Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, the premier *halachic* authority of central Europe at the time. I will refer to Rav Ettlinger by the name he is usually called in *yeshiva* circles, the *Aruch Laneir*, the name of his most famous work, the multi-volumed *Aruch Laneir* commentary on much of *Shas*. The *Aruch Laneir's* reply was subsequently published in his work of responsa called *Shu't Binyan Tziyon*.

The *Aruch Laneir* contended that one should not change the established *minhag* of Germany and Poland, in practice for more than three hundred years, in which only one person recites *kaddish* at a time. He further notes that although the *Yaavetz* had praised the practice that several people recite *kaddish* in unison, the *Yaavetz* himself had lived in Altoona, Germany, where the accepted practice was that only one person said *kaddish* at a time. (The *Aruch Laneir* notes that he himself was the current *rav* of Altoona and had been so already for several decades.)

Furthermore, the *Aruch Laneir* contends that one cannot compare *Ashkenazic* to *Sefardic* observance for a practical reason. The *Sefardim* are accustomed to praying in unison, and therefore, when they say *kaddish*, everyone exhibits great care to synchronize its recital. When *Ashkenazim* attempt to recite *kaddish* in unison, no one hears the *kaddeishim*. The *Aruch Laneir* notes that when the *kaddish derabbanan* is recited by all mourners, the result is a cacophony. He writes that he wishes he could abolish this custom, since, as a result, no one hears or responds appropriately to *kaddish*. In conclusion, the *Aruch Laneir* is adamant that where the custom is that one person at a time recite *kaddish*, one may not change the practice. On the other hand, we have seen that other authorities cite a custom whereby all the mourners recite *kaddish* in unison.

#### **Conclusion: How does kaddish work?**

The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 86a) records that any sin that a person commits in this world, no matter how grievous, will be atoned if the person does *teshuvah*. This does not mean that the *teshuvah* accomplishes atonement without any suffering. Some sins are so serious that a person must undergo suffering in this world in addition to performing *teshuvah*, before he is forgiven. The greatest sin a person can be guilty of is *chillul Hashem*. Only *teshuvah*, suffering, and the individual's eventual demise will be sufficient to atone for this transgression. Thus, a person's death may result from his having caused a *chillul Hashem*.

The *Maharal* of Prague had a brother, Rav Chayim, who authored a work entitled *Sefer Hachayim*, in which he writes that most people die because at some point in their life they made a *chillul Hashem*. The reason a mourner recites *kaddish* is to use the parent's death as a reason to create *kiddush*

*Hashem* – by reciting *kaddish* – thus, atoning for the original *chillul Hashem* (*Sefer Hachayim*, end of chapter 8). May we all merit to create *kiddush Hashem* in our lives.

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## **Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha Rabbi Yehuda Spitz**

### **Leaving Learning For Levayos**

**For the week ending 26 December 2015 / 14 Tevet 5776**

In Parshas Vayechi we are told of the colossal levayah (funeral) for Yaakov Avinu, from Egypt all the way up to his final resting place, Ma'aras HaMachpella in Chevron. Indeed, the respect and honor accorded to Yaakov Avinu on his passing was universal, and we find that even the Canaanite Kings, no friends of Bnei Yisrael, nonetheless joined in the massive levayah[1].

Although we cannot fathom such a gathering for a funeral, nevertheless, the recent spate of Levayos for Gedolim that engendered public turnout in the hundreds of thousands of mourners has left even the most jaded of secular pundits speechless. The passing of such Gaonim as Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt"l, Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg zt"l, mv"r Rav Yaakov Blau zt"l, the Vizhnitzer Rebbe zt"l, and Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"l, over the last several years, has exemplified how much of a priority it is for us to pay our respect and show our esteem and reverence for these luminaries, as testament to their vast accomplishments as Gedolei HaDor.

Their vastly different backgrounds and constituents notwithstanding, each of these giants' Levayos had attendance well into the tens and hundred thousands, consisting of the full spectrum of religious Jewry.

Indeed, the rewards for attending a levayah, and not just for Gedolim, are many. In fact, this Gemillas Chesed Shel Emes is referred to as a mitzvah that is 'keren kayemes l'olam haba'ah', an eternal one with rewards both in This World and the World to Come, with no diminished returns[2].

Deceased's Needs Fulfilled?

Yet, we find that according to the Gemara and codified as halacha, although 'Talmud Torah Keneged Kulam', Torah study is the greatest of all Mitzvos[3], nevertheless, one is obligated to leave his Torah study in order to properly escort one who has passed on[4].

Although the Gemara qualifies this rule, and asserts that it is relevant only to one who does not have 'kol tzorcho', his required needs, nowadays this is fulfilled with a 'Chevra Kadisha', a Burial Society, and one should not abandon his Torah study to attend a random levayah when basic requirements are being met[5].

However, continues the Gemara, different people have different needs regarding their levayos. A basic minyan is deemed sufficient only for one who is not learned[6]. Yet, for one who is learned, his basic needs for a levayah is an astounding 600,000 attendees, the same number as those present at Kabbolas HaTorah! This is due to the dictum of 'Netilasah K'Nisinasah'; the same number present at Kabbolas HaTorah should be present when the Torah departs, meaning when one who is filled with Torah passes away.

Lest one think that this halacha is referring to a Gadol HaDor or at the very least, a famous Rosh Yeshiva, the Rema explains that in his time, anyone with at least a rudimentary Jewish education (in Chumash and Mishna) is included in this category! Although the Aruch Hashulchan felt that this was possibly only true in the Rema's time, conversely, the Minchas Elazar of Munkacs remarked that in his day (around 85 years ago) this was certainly true; as 'who doesn't sit in shul over Shabbos and recite shnayim mikra v'echad targum?!'[7]

The Gemara concludes that for one who teaches Torah to others, also not referring exclusively to a Gadol Hador or Rosh Yeshiva, but even a Rabbi, Rav, Posek, Maggid Shiur, or Rosh Chaburah, there is no limit, and everyone is obligated to attend his levayah[8]!

Limud or Levayah?

If so, why do we find such numbers of mourners only at Gedolim's levayos? In large cities wouldn't everyone be required to stop their talmud Torah many times a day, simply to escort their fellow man, whom they may not have ever met, to his eternal rest? Although there are several approaches and rationales given to answer this question, it is important to note that many Gedolim grappled with this issue, implying that the question is still better than the answer[9].

The main rationale for leniency is actually based on a machlokes in Even Ha'Ezer regarding attending a wedding Chuppa, where the halacha parallels that of a levayah[10] regarding stopping learning to attend. The Chelkas Mechokek writes that this halacha only applies to one who sees a Chuppa occurring, who must stop his learning to attend the wedding. Yet, if one merely knows about a wedding taking place,

he is not obligated to do so. The Beis Shmuel, however, argues that even if one knows about a wedding, one is obligated to attend, even at the cost of his learning[11]. The famed Netziv[12], Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin zt"l, Rosh Yeshivas Volozhin, maintains that regarding levayos the halacha follows the opinion of the Chelkas Mechokek. He cites proof of this from the words the Gemara in Brachos (and later codified by the Shulchan Aruch) uses in referencing levayos that refers to attending one as 'HaRoeh es HaMeis', seeing one who passed away. The Netziv explains this to mean that unless one actually sees a levayah occurring, he is not obligated to stop his learning to attend. Although several authorities seem reluctant to rely upon this[13], nevertheless, the vast majority of decisors rule this way,[14] that one is not required to attend a levayah and abandon his learning simply because he is aware of one taking place

Other rationales for leniency include: that only Talmud Torah of an individual needs to be halted for a levayah, not public Talmud Torah[15]; that nowadays many levayos do not start at the appointed time, and one needs only to stop learning and attend when he is certain that the levayah is taking place[16]; and that the halacha was referring to when everyone in the city was part of one unified kehillah; ergo, nowadays in large cities, where there is a plethora of kehillas, some with no interaction with another, the ruling would not apply[17]. Additionally, as Rav Eziel Auerbach recently averred to this author, this issue would potentially fall into the category of 'Ais La'asos Lashem, Heiferu Torasecha', a time to act for Hashem to prevent the Torah from being forgotten[18], as otherwise nowadays, especially in large communities, if one is running all day from levayah to levayah, 'Torah, mah t'hei aleha?' [19], there will be no time left to learn!

But one thing is certain. Many Gedolim stress that if one does come across a levayah, he is obligated to stop what he is doing and attend, accompanying the niftar at least four Amos along his final journey[20].

Bitulo Hee Kiyumah

Another interesting related issue is that the Tur and Shulchan Aruch rule that the only constituency that should never stop its learning for any levayah whatsoever is Tashb"ar, Tinokos Shel Beis Rabban, or cheder school children[21]. Yet, nowadays, it is accepted that for the passing of a Gadol, Talmudei Torah are let out, with the children being urged to participate in the levayah as well. How is this allowed?

Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld zt"l, when asked this question, replied that the Gedolim of previous generations felt that having children stop learning to attend the levayah of a Gadol was acceptable in order to show honor to the Torah. He added that, anyway, children nowadays have intersession and vacation on other days when they are not learning. If so, paying last respects to a Gadol is certainly no worse than Bein HaZmanim. Others add that it is purposely done so that the children will learn to appreciate the greatness of Torah. Moreover, in this case 'bitulo hee kiyumah', this brief break for a Gadol's levayah, will undoubtedly engender more and greater Torah learning on the children's part[22].

In the final analysis, if one is attending a levayah, he should not bemoan the fact that he is missing seder. On the contrary, he should focus on the great Mitzva he is performing. By escorting the recently departed to his eternal rest, he is earning his own eternal reward.

This article was written L'iluy Nishmas Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben Yechezkel Shraga, R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Asher Zelig ben Sheindel Mintza and Rina Geulah bas Dreiza Liba, and l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: [yspitz@ohr.edu](mailto:yspitz@ohr.edu).

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz serves as the Sho'el U' Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim. He also currently writes a contemporary halacha column for the Ohr Somayach website titled "Insights Into Halacha". [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/insights\\_into\\_halacha/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/insights_into_halacha/).

[1] See Parshas Vayechi (Bereishis Ch. 50, verses 7 - 13), Gemara Sota (13a), Yerushalmi Sota (Ch. 1, 10), and Rashi, Targum Onkelos, and main commentaries on those pesukim.

[2] Recited daily as part of 'Eilu Devarim' in Birkas HaShachar, based on Mishnayos Pe'ah (Ch. 1, Mishna 1) and Gemara Shabbos (127a). There are several other ma'marei Chazal detailing the rewards of those who are melaveh a meis, and the punishments of those who do not - see Gemara Brachos (18a), Moed Kattan (27b), and Kesuvos (72a). See also Rambam (Hilchos Avel Ch. 14, 1) and Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 361, 1).

[3] Mishna Pe'ah and Gemara Shabbos (ibid.).

[4] Gemara Megillah (3b and 29a) and Kesuvos (17a - b); Rambam (Hilchos Avel, Ch. 14, 9), SMA"G (Ase'in DeRabbanan 2), Tur / Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 361), Chochmas Adam (155, 3), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (198, 8 & 9), and Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 361, 2 - 4).

[5] See Rashi (Kesuvos 17b s.v. lais) and Tosafos (ad loc. aval).

[6] The Gemara's choice of words is 'Ima'an d'lo kari v'tani', which Rashi translates as one who has not learned Chumash or Mishna.]

[7] Rema (Yoreh Deah 361, 1; based on the Ritva's comments to Kesuvos ibid.), Shu"t Minchas Elazar (vol. 1, 26, in the footnote). The Chochmas Adam (153, 3) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (198, 9) follow this assessment as well. Interestingly, and as a counter point to the Minchas Elazar's assertion, the Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 361, 3) writes that the Rema's comment was only 'I'fi doroseihem, kemuvan'. As to the importance of reciting Shnayim Mikra, see previous article titled 'Understanding Shnayim Mikra V'Echad Targum'.

[8] The Chofetz Chaim (Ahavas Chessed vol. 3, Ch. 5, s.v. v'afilu) writes that even a 'zakein m'chachmei hador' is obligated in the Mitzva of Levayas HaMeis, as the Gemara (ibid.) stresses that R' Yehuda b'Rebi Ilai would be mevattel Torah for Hotza'as HaMeis.

[9] For example, the first time the Minchas Elazar addressed this issue (Shu"t vol. 1, ibid.) he wrote several pages of shakla v'tarya but was ultimately unsuccessful in finding a proper solution. It is only in later responsa that he hit upon, and agreed to, the Netziv's approach. Likewise, in Halichos Shlomo (Tefilla, Ch. 13, footnote 22), a story is told of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l and Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, who both admitted to being very bothered with this issue, and not being fully satisfied with the general custom.

[10] See Rambam (Hilchos Avel ibid.) and Rema (Even Ha'Ezer 65, 1). In fact the actual words of the Gemara (Megillah and Kesuvos ibid.) are 'Mevattlin Talmud Torah l'Hotzaas HaMes Ul'Hachnosas Kallah'. The Yad Eliyahu (Shu"t 39, cited by Pischei Teshuva in Even Ha'Ezer 65, 3) cites proof to this from Koheles (Ch. 3, verses 1 - 8). All of the different 'times for actions' are written with a lamed, except two: 'eis sefod v'eis rikod', 'a time to eulogize and a time to dance', to teach that exclusively for these two times one is required to be mevattel his limud.

[11] Chelkas Mechokek (Even Ha'Ezer 65, 2), and Beis Shmuel (ad loc. 3). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim vol. 2, 95, s.v. u'lchein) wrote an interesting teshuva regarding one who wants to attend a chasuna during Sefiras Ha'Omer, but it is still 'Sefirah' for him (meaning the Baalei Simcha kept a different 'Sefirah' than the guest. This issue was addressed at length in an article titled Switching Sefirahs: Understanding Your Minhag and its Ramifications) and consequently he prohibited to take a haircut. Rav Moshe writes that if the guest is embarrassed to show up without a haircut, he may get one. He explains that according to the Beis Shmuel it is a chiyuv to attend a wedding one knows about, and although the Chelkas Mechokek maintains that it is only obligatory when one sees a Chuppa occurring, that is only regarding whether one is required to stop his Torah learning; he certainly would agree that one who is not currently learning still receives a mitzvah for attending a wedding.

[12] Ha'amek Sheilah (on the Sheiltos, Parshas Chayei Sara, Sheilta 14, 2 and Parshas Vayechi, Sheilta 34, 2), Gemara Brachos (18a), Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 361, 3).

[13] See Shu"t Yad Eliyahu (39; cited by the Pischei Teshuva both in Hilchos Levayas HaMeis, Yoreh Deah 361, 2 and Hilchos Kiddushin, Even Ha'Ezer 65, 3), and Gesher HaChaim (vol. 1, Ch. 4, 7, pg. 127 - 128, see extensive footnote 3, and vol. 2, Ch. 10, 4, s.v. v'HaBeis Shmuel).

[14] Including the Sheilas Dovid (end Shu"t vol. 1, Chiddushim to Yoreh Deah 361 pg. 16), the Minchas Elazar (Shu"t vol. 2, Kuntress Shirei Mincha on vol. 1, 26, s.v. uv'inyan and vol. 4, 2, s.v. uv'hemshech), Sdei Chemed (Maareches Chassan V'Kallah 22 and Aveilus 192), Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld (Shu"t Salmas Chaim, new print, Yoreh Deah 194), the Debreciner Rav (Shu"t Ba'er Moshe vol. 4, 98), the Tzitz Eliezer (Shu"t vol. 5, Kuntress Ramat Rochel, 50, 2, 3, s.v. ukmo"k and vol. 7, Kuntress Even Yaakov 21), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 4, pg. 323, 13), Rav Chaim Kanievsky (in an unpublished teshuva to R' Yitzchok Winkler, dated 6 Kislev 5768), Yalkut Yosef (Hilchos Aveilus, 10, 4, pg. 237), and Pnei Baruch (Ch. 5, end 3, pg. 53).

[15] Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 4, s.v. v'nirah). Additionally, in Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 2, 452 s.v. ula"d) Rav Sternbuch writes that the Gr"a's kavanna in his comment (Yoreh Deah 361, 2; based on the Yerushalmi in Pesachim Ch. 3 and Chagiga Ch. 1), is to explain the Shulchan Aruch's ruling differently, that one is only required to leave learning if he is not actively 'osek ba'Torah', then one should not go back to learn, rather attend the levayah. But one who is currently immersed in his learning would not be mandated to stop and attend the levayah.

[16] Halichos Shlomo (ibid.) and Yalkut Yosef (ibid.).

[17] Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 4, 213 s.v. v'yeish and pg. 323, 13).

[18] This author personally heard this sevara to explain the common custom from Rav Ezeriel Auerbach shlit"a. The source is Tehillim (Ch. 119, verse 126). The best known example of applying this is R' Yehuda HaNassi's (Rebba) writing and codifying Torah SheBaal Peh as the Mishna. For additional examples of this and when this may be applied see Gemara Sanhedrin (17a) and Kli Yakar (Parshas Re'eh, Devarim Ch. 17, 11).

[19] See Gemara Brachos (35b), Nazir (50a), Kedushin (52b & 66a), and Midrash Esther Rabba (Ch. 7, end 13).

[20] Several poskim maintain that this applies even if one is in a car or bus, or if one sees the levayah while in another reshus. See Gesher HaChaim (vol. 1, Ch. 14, 9), Halichos Shlomo (ibid.), Shu"t Shevet HaKehasi (vol. 4, 284 and vol. 5, 214), Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (ibid. end s.v. aimasai), Maaseh Ish (vol. 2, 122), and Yalkut Yosef (Aveilus pg. 244). Interestingly, some wish to draw a parallel from the halachos of Kibud Av V'Eim and Kibud Rabo [see Chayei Adam (vol.1, 67, end 7) and Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Ki Seitzei 13)] that one is not required to stand up for a father or Rebba while technically in a different reshus than he is.

[21] Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 361, end 1), Shach (ad loc. 6), Biur HaGr"a (ad loc. 3), Chochmas Adam (155, end 3), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (198, 9), Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 361, 3). The reason being that Chazal state that the breath of children learning Torah holds up the world (Gemara Shabbos 119b), and should not cease even for a Gadol's levayah. This is not like the opinion of the Rashal (Yam Shel Shlomo, Kesuvos Ch. 2, 5) who maintains that for a Gadol's funeral, children should stop learning to attend.

[22] Shu"t Salmas Chaim (new print, Yoreh Deah 192), Gesher HaChaim (vol. 1, Ch. 14, 4), Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 4, pg. 323, 13 and footnote 13 s.v. mihu), Shu"t Yabea Omer (vol. 2, Orach Chaim 25, 9 and vol. 4, Orach Chaim 35, 1), Pnei Baruch (Ch. 5, 3, and footnote 13), Yalkut Yosef (Aveilus Ch. 10, 4), and personally heard from Rav Ezeriel Auerbach.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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