

Home Weekly Parsha PINCHAS 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah portion warns us not to be swept away by current culture, media, and societal popularity, and by those who are quick to condemn others for their thoughts and actions.

When Pinchas killed Zimri and his consort, he was roundly criticized and threatened by the those in Jewish society because of this act of zealotry. When this act occurred, society considered it to be wrong, harmful, and worthy of criticism. Later, in the full light and perspective of the time, this act was not only acceptable, but the obvious path necessary, and, in fact, heroic.

Pinchas' critics mentioned the fact that his own pedigree was uncertain, since, although he was the grandson of Aaron, he was also a product of a woman who was of Midianite origin. Moshe himself was married to a daughter of Yitro the high priest of Midian and did nothing. By what right, then, did Pinchas take it upon himself to commit this double killing?

Implicit in this is the accusation as to who made him the zealot, the enforcer, so to speak, of God's will. This was a usurpation of power and status that he arrogated to himself. In short, Pinchas was not to be seen as a hero or as a holy person. But, rather, he was considered the impetuous upstart that committed a double killing without proper sanction or legality. The Torah records that heaven itself intervened to set the record straight, and to clearly support and justify the behavior and actions of Pinchas.

There are so many times in history that this story has repeated itself, albeit always under different circumstances. History turns temporary heroes, beloved in their time, into eternal villains when judged by later historical facts and occurrences. History can also rehabilitate people and ideas that were once scorned, held up to ridicule and contempt, and show how the original judgment, event or person was faulty.

There have been many movements and personalities in the history of the Jewish people who achieved temporary fame and popularity, but who are completely forgotten in the long view that history grants us. And many who were criticized, called obstructionists and out of touch with society, have proven to be prescient and heroic in retrospect.

We are always quick to judge, especially when we have our own preconceived ideas as to what is or what should be. We can look back and see the mistakes of previous generations, of physical and spiritual tragedy within the Jewish world. Yet, somehow, we also continue today to allow our own personal biases to affect our judgment of events, leaders, and ideas. This is one of the most fundamental ideas that we can learn from the reading of

this week. It is especially relevant to our current society and its challenges.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Elijah and the Still, Small Voice

PINCHAS

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'Why are you here, Elijah?' He replied, I am moved by the zeal for the Lord, God of Hosts...' The Lord said to him, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire – a still, small voice.

I Kings 19:9-12

In 1165, an agonising question confronted Moroccan Jewry. A fanatical Muslim sect, the Almohads, had seized power in Morocco and was embarking on a policy of forced conversion to Islam. The Jewish community was faced with a choice: to affirm Islamic faith or die. Some chose martyrdom. Others chose exile. But some acceded to terror and embraced another faith. Inwardly, though, many of the 'converted' continued practising Judaism in secret. They were the anusim, conversos, Crypto-Jews, or as the Spanish were later to call them, the marranos.

To other Jews, they posed a formidable moral problem. How were they to be viewed? Outwardly, they had betrayed their community and their religious heritage. Besides, their example was demoralising. It weakened the resolve of Jews who were determined to resist, come what may. Yet many of the Crypto-Jews still wished to remain Jewish, secretly fulfilling the commandments and, when they could, attending the synagogue and praying.

One of the converted addressed this question to a Rabbi. He had, he said, converted under coercion, but he remained at heart a faithful Jew. Could he obtain merit by observing in private as many of the Torah's precepts as possible? Was there, in other words, hope left for him as a Jew? The Rabbi's reply was emphatic. A Jew who had embraced Islam had forfeited membership in the Jewish community. He was no longer part of the house of Israel. For such a person to fulfil the commandments was meaningless. Worse, it was a sin. The choice was stark and absolute: to be or not to be a Jew. If you choose to be a Jew, you should be prepared to suffer death rather than compromise. If you choose not to be a Jew, then you must not seek to re-enter the house you deserted.

We can respect the firmness of the Rabbi's stance. He set out, without equivocation, the moral choice. There are

times when heroism is, for faith, a categorical imperative. Nothing less will do. His reply, though harsh, is not without courage. But another Rabbi disagreed.

The name of the first Rabbi is lost to us, but that of the second is not. He was Moses Maimonides, the greatest Rabbi of the Middle Ages. Maimonides was no stranger to religious persecution. Born in Cordova in 1135, he had been forced to leave, along with his family, some thirteen years later when the city fell to the Almohads. Twelve years were spent in wandering. In 1160, a temporary liberalisation of Almohad rule allowed the family to settle in Morocco. Within five years he was forced to move again, settling first in the land of Israel and ultimately in Egypt.

Maimonides was so incensed by the Rabbi's reply to the forced convert that he wrote a response of his own. In it, he frankly disassociates himself from the earlier ruling and castigates its author whom he describes as a 'self-styled sage who has never experienced what so many Jewish communities had to endure in the way of persecution'.

Maimonides' reply, the Iggeret ha-Shemad ('Epistle on Forced Conversion'), is a substantial treatise in its own right.[1] What is striking, given the vehemence with which it begins, is that its conclusions are hardly less demanding than those of the earlier response. If you are faced with religious persecution, says Maimonides, you must leave and settle elsewhere. 'If he is compelled to violate even one precept it is forbidden to stay there. He must leave everything he has and travel day and night until he finds a spot where he can practise his religion.'^[2] This is preferable to martyrdom.

Nonetheless, one who chooses to go to their death rather than renounce their faith 'has done what is good and proper'^[3] for they have given their life for the sanctity of God. What is unacceptable is to stay and excuse oneself on the grounds that if one sins, one does so only under pressure. To do this is to profane God's name, 'not exactly willingly, but almost so'.

These are Maimonides' conclusions. But surrounding them and constituting the main thrust of his argument is a sustained defence of those who have done precisely what Maimonides has ruled they should not do. The letter gives Crypto-Jews hope. They have done wrong. But it is a forgivable wrong. They acted under coercion and the fear of death. They remain Jews. The acts they do as Jews still win favour in the eyes of God. Indeed doubly so, for when they fulfil a commandment it cannot be to win favour of the eyes of others. They know that when they act as Jews they risk discovery and death. Their secret adherence has a heroism of its own.

What was wrong in the first Rabbi's ruling was his insistence that a Jew who yields to terror has forsaken their faith and is to be excluded from the community. Maimonides insists that it is not so. 'It is not right to alienate, scorn and hate people who desecrate the Sabbath.

It is our duty to befriend them and encourage them to fulfil the commandments.'^[4] In a daring stroke of interpretation, he quotes the verse, 'Do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving.' (Proverbs 6:30) The Crypto-Jews who come to the synagogue are hungry for Jewish prayer. They 'steal' moments of belonging. They should not be despised but welcomed.

This epistle is a masterly example of that most difficult of moral challenges: to combine prescription and compassion. Maimonides leaves us in no doubt as to what he believes Jews should do. But at the same time he is uncompromising in his defence of those who fail to do it. He does not endorse what they have done. But he defends who they are. He asks us to understand their situation. He gives them grounds for self-respect. He holds the doors of the community open.

The argument reaches a climax as Maimonides quotes a remarkable sequence of midrashic passages whose theme is that prophets must not condemn their people, but rather defend them before God. When Moses, charged with leading the people out of Egypt, replied, 'But they will not believe me' (Exodus 4:1) ostensibly he was justified. The subsequent biblical narrative suggests that Moses' doubts were well founded. The Israelites were a difficult people to lead. But the Midrash says that God replied to Moses, 'They are believers and the children of believers, but you [Moses] will ultimately not believe.'^[5] (Shabbat 97a)

Maimonides cites a series of similar passages and then says: If this is the punishment meted out to the pillars of the universe, the greatest of the prophets, because they briefly criticised the people – even though they were guilty of the sins of which they were accused – can we envisage the punishment awaiting those who criticise the conversos, who under threat of death and without abandoning their faith, confessed to another religion in which they did not believe?

In the course of his analysis, Maimonides turns to the Prophet Elijah and the text that usually forms this week's haftarah. Under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal worship had become the official cult. God's prophets were being killed. Those who survived were in hiding. Elijah responded by issuing a public challenge at Mount Carmel. Facing four hundred of Baal's representatives, he was determined to settle the question of religious truth once and for all.

He told the assembled people to choose one way or another: for God or for Baal. They must no longer 'halt between two opinions.' Truth was about to be decided by a test. If it lay with Baal, fire would consume the offering prepared by its priests. If it lay with God, fire would descend to Elijah's offering.

Elijah won the confrontation. The people cried out, 'The Lord, He is God.' The priests of Baal were routed. But the story does not end there. Jezebel issues a warrant for his death. Elijah escapes to Mount Horeb. There he receives a

strange vision, as seen as the beginning of this week's essay. He is led to understand that God speaks only in the 'still, small voice'.

The episode is enigmatic. It is made all the more so by a strange feature of the text. Immediately before the vision, God asks, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' and Elijah replies, 'I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts....' (I Kings 19:9-10). Immediately after the vision, God asks the same question, and Elijah gives the same answer (I Kings 19:13-14). The Midrash turns the text into a dialogue:

Elijah: The Israelites have broken God's covenant.

God: Is it then your covenant?

Elijah: They have torn down Your altars.

God: But were they your altars?

Elijah: They have put Your prophets to the sword.

God: But you are alive.

Elijah: I alone am left.

God: Instead of hurling accusations against Israel, should you not have pleaded their cause?[5]

The meaning of the Midrash is clear. The zealot takes the part of God. But God expects His prophets to be defenders, not accusers. The repeated question and answer is now to be understood in its tragic depth. Elijah declares himself to be zealous for God. He is shown that God is not disclosed in dramatic confrontation: not in the whirlwind or the earthquake or the fire. God now asks him again, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Elijah repeats that he is zealous for God. He has not understood that religious leadership calls for another kind of virtue, the way of the still, small voice. God now indicates that someone else must lead. Elijah must hand his mantle on to Elisha.

In turbulent times, there is an almost overwhelming temptation for religious leaders to be confrontational. Not only must truth be proclaimed but falsehood must be denounced. Choices must be set out as stark divisions. Not to condemn is to condone. The Rabbi who condemned the conversos had faith in his heart, logic on his side and Elijah as his precedent.

But the Midrash and Maimonides set before us another model. A prophet hears not one imperative but two: guidance and compassion, a love of truth and an abiding solidarity with those for whom that truth has become eclipsed. To preserve tradition and at the same time defend those others condemn is the difficult, necessary task of religious leadership in an unreligious age.

[1] An English translation and commentary is contained in Abraham S. Halkin, and David Hartman. *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985) pp. 15-35. [2] *Ibid.*, 32. [3] *Ibid.*, 30. [4] *Ibid.*, 33. [5] *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:6.

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**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
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Parshat Pinchas

The Seeker

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit...' " (27:18)

What is the essential ingredient of greatness?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, zatzal, one of the great Torah scholars of the previous generation, was once visiting his uncle, Rabbi Avraham Yafin, zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Nevardok Yeshiva. As they entered the Beit Midrash (study hall), Rabbi Shmuelevitz asked Rabbi Yafin, "Who is your sharpest student?" Discreetly, Rabbi Yafin pointed out a certain pupil. "And who is the most studious?" Rabbi Yafin showed him another. "And who has the greatest breadth of knowledge?" Rabbi Yafin indicated yet a third. "And who," said Rabbi Shmuelevitz finally, "is the best student?" Rabbi Shmuelevitz was surprised when Rabbi Yafin indicated none of the previously mentioned students, but another one entirely.

"He is my best bachur (young man)," said Rabbi Yafin.

"But until now you didn't mention him," said Rabbi Shmuelevitz. "What makes him the best?"

Rabbi Yafin looked at Rabbi Shmuelevitz and said, "This one is a seeker."

In the ascent to greatness, the most precious quality that a person can have is the desire to seek, to pursue truth with ceaseless and tireless longing.

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit...'"

The Sforno explains the phrase, "a man in whom there is spirit," to mean "prepared to receive the Light of the Face of the Living Hashem." The Sforno compares Yehoshua to the artisans who crafted the Mishkan and its vessels in the desert. About them, Hashem said, "And into the heart of all wise of heart, I have placed wisdom." (Shmot 31:6)

The closest those artisans had come to the extremely skilled work needed to construct the Mishkan was carrying cement to build Egyptian treasure-cities. How were they able, with no previous experience, to fabricate something as beautiful, delicate and spiritually precise as the Mishkan?

To be "wise of heart" means to be prepared to receive "the Light of the Face of the Living Hashem." It means being dissatisfied with the knowledge that one has already. It means to want more. It means to want Hashem's radiance to illuminate our minds. Whatever those craftsmen lacked in experience was more than made up for by their overwhelming enthusiasm to build the Mishkan.

When the Torah lists the heads of the Jewish People who were sent to spy out the Land of Israel, it lists them according to their importance. Yehoshua appears fifth in that list. Hashem chose him to be the leader of the Jewish People precisely because he was a seeker and wanted more.

When Moshe ascended to the supernal realms, Yehoshua waited for him at the foot of Mount Sinai for forty days. Yehoshua took no tea breaks, no days off. Even though he could have rushed out to meet Moshe and resumed his learning as soon as Moshe returned, Yehoshua was not prepared to waste those few precious extra moments between the camp and the foot of the mountain.

Such is the nature of a seeker.

Oh, by the way, I almost forgot. That student who Rabbi Avraham Yafin described as his “best bachur” became better known as the Steipler Gaon, one of the greatest halachic arbiters of his generation.

· Source: Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in *Sichot Mussar*, with thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman and Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

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***Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Pinchas
Don't Be Frumer Than the Shulchan Aruch***

The pasuk in this week's parsha says, “Harass the Midianites and smite them. For they harassed you...” (Bamidbar 25:17-18). The Ribono shel Olam tells Moshe that he should take revenge from the Midianites for what they did to Klal Yisrael. The Medrash Tanchuma comments on this: “One who rises up to kill you—preemptively kill him. Rav Shimon says, ‘How do we know that someone who causes his friend to sin is worse than someone who kills his friend?’ It is because when someone kills another person, the victim still has a portion in the World-to-Come. However, when someone causes his friend to be sinful, he causes the friend to lose both this world and the next world.

The Medrash continues: Two nations approached the Jewish nation by sword (attacking us physically, but not spiritually) and two other nations approached them by attempting to entice them to sin (attacking them spiritually). Mitzrayim and Edom attacked us physically, but Amon and Moav attacked us spiritually. By the former nations we are commanded “Do not hate them” (Devorim 23:8). By the third generation following their conversion, we are allowed to intermarry with them (Devorim 23:9). However, concerning those who caused us to sin, it is written “Neither an Ammonite nor a Moavite shall enter into the Congregation of Hashem, even in the tenth generation they shall not enter into the Congregation of Hashem, forever.” (Devorim 23:4)

Ammon and Moav are on the “Enemies List” forever, because they did something far worse than trying to kill us physically. They tried to seduce us. They tried to take away our Olam HaBah. Therefore, the Ribono shel Olam rejects them eternally.

The Medrash continues and says that someone who has mercy on an Ammonite will end up suffering. He will come to shame, to wars, and to troubles. If the Torah rejects them and places them “off limits” then we are not

allowed to show them kindness or to be nice to them. This is an old principle: Don't be frumer (more religious) than the Torah. The Medrash gives an example of someone who had mercy on an Ammonite and, as a result, suffered terribly: Dovid HaMelech. As it is written: “And Dovid said I will do a kindness with Chonan son of Nachash, as his father did with me...” (Shmuel II 10:2)

Nachash was the King of Amon, and at one point he did a favor to Dovid (Shmuel I Chapter 11). Dovid HaMelech now wanted to repay the favor, so when Nachash died, he sent messengers to be Menachem Avel (extend condolence wishes to the mourner) to this Ammonite. The Medrash relates: “The Holy One Blessed be He said, ‘You have transgressed My Word to not inquire about or be concerned about their welfare. And you showed them acts of kindness. ‘Don't be overly righteous!’ (Koheles 7:16)”.

What happened to Dovid as a result of this gesture? We won't go into all the details of a long and complicated story in Tanach, but to make a long story short, when the messengers of Dovid HaMelech arrived at the palace, they were treated brutally, stripped down to the waist, and half their beards were cut off to mock them.

This is the point of the Medrash: A person should only do what the Torah says, and not try to improve on the Torah's morality. If the Torah says about the Ammonites and Moavites “Don't seek their welfare or their benefit,” we should follow the Torah and not be more “religious” than the Word of G-d.

The sefer *Otzros haTorah* brings a fantastic incident: When Rav Moshe Feinstein was a Rav in Luban, Russia, there was a Jew in the city who was a moser. A moser is a person that snitches to the government against Jews. (One has to realize that this incident took place in the 1930s, under the Stalinist Government. The Communists were at their height of power and were terrible to the Jews.) There were unfortunately Jews who were members of the Communist party, and they would snitch on other Jews to get them into trouble with the Soviet authorities.

The moser died and he left a letter to the Chevra Kadisha (Burial Society) in which he confessed that he had been sinful during his life, and stated that now prior to death he regretted those actions. He bemoaned the fact that he was responsible for having Jews arrested, sent to Siberia, and killed. Out of shame and repentance, he stated that he wished to achieve kappara (atonement) after death for his actions, and hence requested of the Chevra Kadisha that they not give him a proper Jewish burial. He requested that his body be mutilated and abused. “I don't want to have a tahara—just roll me in the gutter as a kappara for what I did in my lifetime.”

The Chevra Kadisha came to the Rav of Luban, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and showed him this “Last Will and Testament” of this Moser, and asked for his advice. Rav Moshe paskened that they were not allowed to treat a Jewish body disrespectfully, and that they had to bury him with a tahara

and with all the honor and dignity accorded to any Jewish person being buried. He ruled that no person is the master over his own body, and this person had no right to make such a request. “What is going to happen to him after death is between him and the Ribono shel Olam, but we cannot take the law into our own hands and do this to another Jew because it is against the Din (Jewish law).”

The Chevra Kadisha tried to argue with Rav Moshe, repeating what an evil person this fellow was. Rav Moshe persisted: “This is what it says in Shulchan Aruch. You need to follow the Din. Don’t be frumer than the Torah.”

The Chevra Kaddisah buried the fellow, perhaps not with “full military honors,” but with normal Kavod HaMeisim (dignity due to the dead). A few days after the burial, the watchman at the cemetery reported that officers from the Russian Government came and insisted that the body be exhumed. The watchman was not in a position to tell the government officers “Sorry, we don’t do that type of thing.”

They dug up the grave. They opened the coffin. They looked at the body. They closed the coffin. And they reburied him. Before they left, the watchman asked if they could give him an explanation about what just happened. They told him what happened: Before this moser died, he sent a second letter. He sent a letter to the government stating that he could demonstrate how much the Jews hate the Communist authorities. “They are not going to give me a proper Jewish funeral because I was a friend of the government.”

Lo and behold, when they opened the coffin, they saw that he was buried k’das u’k’din (according to Jewish law) and that the allegation in the letter he sent them was in no way true. The moral of this story is: Keep what is written in Shulchan Aruch. Shulchan Aruch states what we are supposed to do. We should not try to outsmart the Shulchan Aruch, and we should not try to be frumer than the Shulchan Aruch. “Al te’hee Tzadik Harbeh” — ‘Don’t be overly righteous!’ (Koheles 7:16).

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Pinchas - Deserved Rewards

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Obedience of the law is demanded; not asked as a favor - Theodore Roosevelt

When a person is contracted to do a job, when the work is defined, when the compensation is agreed upon and the worker does the job, then they receive the agreed-upon compensation. If the employer is gracious, they will also thank the worker. If the employer is generous and wants to show appreciation for a job well done, they may also

include some type of tip or bonus, depending on the type of work and circumstances. However, as a rule, the employer pays the worker what was agreed.

The Chidushei HaRim on Numbers 25:11 explains that the Jewish people have, among the many types of relationships with God, a contractual one. God gives us life and in turn, we serve Him. If we serve Him, we are deserving of our divinely prescribed life in this world. However, it is apparently also in God’s nature to go over and above the mere terms of the contract. God is generous. He is so generous that he gives us continued life and rewards, even when we aren’t necessarily deserving. Nonetheless, according to the Chidushei HaRim, the basis of what we receive from God is earned by our actions, actions that are expected of us. It’s our job, it’s our duty and so our “salary” is based on those required actions.

Enter Pinchas. Pinchas, together with the leadership of Israel, is confronted with a scene of rebellion and promiscuousness that gives Moses pause. Pinchas realizes that to quell the rebellion he needs to immediately take matters into his own hands. He must act. He undertakes a dangerous and unsanctioned act of vigilantism and kills the rebellious ringleader and his immodest partner. Nobody commanded Pinchas to take such an act and risk himself. It turns out that Pinchas’ lethal act stopped the advance of the plague that had erupted as a result of God’s anger, and which killed 24,000 people in the space of a few moments. Thereafter, God goes on to describe Pinchas’ reward for his actions.

The Chidushei HaRim elaborates that in this case, the rewards that Pinchas receives are truly earned. There was no bonus here. Pinchas did not need to do what he did. It was not part of any contract or prior obligation. Pinchas over-extended himself to do what he understood to be right, to do something that he felt God would want, though neither he nor anybody else had been commanded or expected to do so. That deserved its own reward beyond any contractual understanding with God.

May we always aim to do the right thing, whether it’s demanded of us or not.

Dedication - On the Brit Milah and naming of our grandson, Oded Chaim Spitz. Mazal Tov! Shabbat Shalom Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Pinchas - Four Comments on Leadership

This week’s Torah portion, Pinchas, describes a series of events that occurred prior to the children of Israel entering the Land of Israel. Let’s focus on two of those events: the story of the request made by the daughters of Zelophehad, an unknown man from the tribe of Menashe, to receive their portion of the land in the Land of Israel; and the dialogue between G-d and Moses regarding the transfer of

leadership from Moses to Joshua. We will concentrate on the comments made by the famous biblical commentator Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, northern France, 1040 – 1105) and notice how the Torah constructs for us the image of the ideal leader.

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad begins with a census of the children of Israel ahead of entering the Land of Israel and the division of portions to the tribes, families, and individuals. As was customary in those days, the census was done of the men of the family.

The daughters of Zelophehad, whose father had died, were concerned that they would be deprived of a portion of land and came to Moses to complain:

Why should our father's name be eliminated from his family because he had no son? Give us a portion along with our father's brothers.

Moses' immediate response is not written in the Torah. We are surprised to discover that he didn't know the answer so he turned to the source of biblical law: G-d:

So Moses brought their case before the Lord. (Numbers 27, 4-5)

Rashi reveals to us that it was not a coincidence that Moses didn't know the answer. "The law eluded him, and here he was punished for crowning himself (with authority) by saying, 'and the case that it too difficult for you, bring to me.'" Rashi notes a hint of arrogance in Moses' words when calling to the nation to present him with their questions and challenges. As a result, G-d reveals to all of us that even Moses, the master of prophets, does not know everything. Sometimes, even he needed to clarify a law he was not clear about.

Now, let's turn from the story of the daughters of Zelophehad to the description of the transfer of leadership. G-d turns to Moses and instructs him:

The Lord said to Moses, "Go up to this mount Abarim and look at the land that I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people...(Ibid, Ibid 12-13)

This was undoubtedly a difficult message. If we expected Moses to mourn what he was told, we would be surprised at his reaction. He turns to G-d and asks Him to appoints a new leader for the nation "so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep without a shepherd." Rashi points out, "This (verse comes) to let us know the virtues of the righteous, for when they are about to depart from the world, they disregard their own needs and occupy themselves with the needs of the community." As a devoted and dedicated leader, Moses put his own personal story aside and dealt with national needs.

If we pay attention to the language Moses used, we will discern two additional aspects that complete the picture:

Let the Lord, the God of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go forth before them and come before them... (Ibid, Ibid 16-17)

The name "the G-d of spirits of all flesh" is not common in the Torah. Why did Moses choose this moniker? Rashi explains that there is a strong connection between this moniker and the personality of the intended leader. "Why is this said? He said to Him, 'Master of the universe, the character of each person is revealed to you, and no two are alike. Appoint over them a leader who will tolerate each person according to his individual character.'" A worthy leader is one who can accept all the different streams in the nation, with all their various opinions, lifestyles, and aspirations which sometimes oppose one another. A worthy leader is not the leader of a specific group, or a specific sector. He is a leader of the entire nation, someone "who will tolerate each person according to his individual character."

This brings us to the description of a leader's role: "who will go forth before them and come before them." This obscure phrase is explained by Rashi in the following manner: "Not like the kings of the (gentile) nations, who sit at home and send their armies to war, but as I did, for I fought against Sihon and Og." A worthy leader takes responsibility and marches at the head of the nation. The concept of a commander calling to his soldiers to follow him began with Moses.

Humility, dedication to the nation's needs, tolerance, and taking responsibility – all these are the traits of an ideal leader, as Rashi taught us based on the words of the Torah. These are the traits we must seek out in searching for a leader, and these are the traits we must nurture in ourselves and in the precious treasures we are responsible for nurturing – our children and pupils.

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Rav Kook Torah

Matot: Beateous Evil

The Offering of Midianite Jewelry

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

After the reprisal attack against Midian, the Israelite soldiers presented an unusual donation to the Tabernacle: gold jewelry seized from the Midianite women.

"We wish to bring an offering to God. Every man who found a gold article - an anklet, a bracelet, a ring, an earring, or a body ornament - to atone for our souls before God." (Num. 31:50)

Why did the soldiers bring this odd offering to the Tabernacle? The Talmud (Shabbat 64a) explains that they felt a need for atonement - not for improper actions - but for improper thoughts when they came in contact with the Midianite women.

Still, why not bring a more conventional offering? And why does the Torah list all of the various types of Midianite ornaments?

Some of the jewelry was of the normal variety, worn in full view, such as rings and bracelets. Other pieces, however, were of an intimate nature, worn underneath the clothes,

like the kumaz, a suggestive body ornament. From the association that the Torah makes between ordinary jewelry and intimate ornaments, the Talmud derives the moral lesson that “to gaze at a woman’s little finger [for enjoyment] is like staring at her undressed.”

What is so terrible about enjoying a woman’s natural aesthetic beauty?

The Snare of Superficial Beauty

On its own accord, beauty has intrinsic worth, and can make a positive impression on the soul. The soul gains a wonderful sense of expansiveness when it experiences aesthetic pleasures that are pure.

However, if the beauty is covering up that which is ethically repulsive, this attractiveness becomes a spiritual hazard. The external charm is but a snare, entrapping in its inner ugliness those caught in its net. In general, we only succumb to that which is morally repugnant when it is cloaked in a veneer of superficial beauty.

This was precisely the *casus belli* for the war against Midian. The young women of Moab and Midian enticed the men with their outer beauty, leading them to perform the vile idolatrous practices of Pe’or. The Midrash describes their method:

“When [the Israelite man] was overcome by lust and asked her to submit to him, she pulled out a statue of Pe’or from her bosom and demanded: ‘First, prostrate yourself before this!’” (Sifrei 25:1; Rashi on Num. 25:2)

This phenomenon encompasses an even greater pitfall. The simple act of staring at that which is prohibited undermines the soul’s healthy sense of moral rectitude and purity. If we are attracted to that which is morally repugnant, we become desensitized to the ugliness of the sin. The superficial beauty not only conceals the inner sordidness, it diminishes our loathing for it.

Even if the soul has not been sufficiently corrupted to be actually ensnared in the net of immorality, its purity has nevertheless been tainted by an attraction to that which is forbidden. For this reason, the Israelite soldiers who fought against Midian required atonement. To make amends for their spiritual deterioration, they brought a particularly appropriate offering: gold jewelry, whose shiny and glittery exterior concealed its corrupt inner core. The officers donated jewelry that is worn openly, as well as ornaments worn intimately. They recognized that both types of jewelry share the potential to desensitize the soul and damage its integrity.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, p. 116)

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Pinchas

פרשת פנחס תשפ"ב

פנחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן

Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen. (25:11)

When the Torah details Pinchas’ lineage, it does so only up until Aharon. In other instances, while the Torah does not list ancestors all the way to the Patriarchs, it does extend to the *rosh ha’mishpachah*, head of the family. For example, Betzalel’s lineage is recorded up to Yehudah, and Ohaliav’s is listed up to Dan. The Torah stops short of Yaakov *Avinu*. Concerning Pinchas, the Torah stops with Aharon. Why not mention Amram and Levi? [Simply, we could say that the Torah is addressing the *Kehunah* and Pinchas’ relationship to it. Amram and Levi were not *Kohanim*, since *Kehunah*, the Priesthood, commenced with Aharon.] *Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl*, suggests that the Torah underscores Aharon’s name for an important reason. It imparts a vital message concerning the spiritual/ethical character of both Aharon and his grandson, Pinchas.

We are well-aware that a sudden, unusual, irregular act can indicate the pathology that lurks beneath the veil of the routine. In other words, one can routinely act modestly, with utmost humility, until he is offended, at which time he lets loose with various maledictions, because he has been insulted. People act in a certain manner only because, at the time, it serves them well. When someone or something provokes them, however, they might act differently – atypical of their nature. For example, Avraham *Avinu* subdued his fatherly love and compassion for Yitzchak *Avinu* and listened to Hashem when He commanded him to slaughter his and Sarah *Imeinu*’s son. How do we know that this was actually not indicative of Avraham’s real nature? We see this from the manner in which he carried out all of his “routine” acts of *chesed*. They were all executed under the rubric of his *yiraas Shomayim*. Avraham’s acts of *chesed* were not happenstance, carried out when it was convenient and popular. He did not act kindly to assuage his ego. He was real, carrying out Hashem’s command to act kindly to people. The *Akeidah*, Binding of Yitzchak, demanded of him that he go against his inherent nature by subduing his fatherly love.

Likewise, Aharon *HaKohen*’s reputation was based on love for his fellowman, pursuing and promoting peace between men and between husband and wife. Suddenly, his grandson commits an act of zealotry, which the people viewed as wanton murder. As Aharon’s grandson, it might indicate that Aharon is not as “perfect” as he is portrayed. Was Aharon really like Pinchas, or, on the contrary, was Pinchas’ act of zealotry rooted in his love for *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem? The answer lies in heralding Pinchas’ act of zealotry to his grandfather, Aharon, and, concomitantly, Aharon’s pursuit of peace, his abiding love of Hashem. His total abdication to carrying out His will was no different than Pinchas’ act of slaying the perpetrator who had profaned Hashem’s Name. They were all connected.

Conversely, Pinchas’ act of zealotry was not unlike Aharon’s pursuit of peace. He knew that peace could only reign if the entire nation were to glorify Hashem’s Name. Zimri was a perpetrator whose incursion defamed Hashem,

undermined Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and impugned the integrity of *Klal Yisrael*. For the sake of peace, he had to be stopped. Aharon *HaKohen's* grandson took it upon himself to be the zealot in order to preserve peace.

בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם

When he zealously avenged Me among them. (25:11)

The zealot acts on behalf of Hashem. After being completely certain that he has expunged every vestige of personal interest and emotion, to the point that he truly feels that he is acting only for Hashem, then he can move forward by acting zealously. The commentators question the meaning of *b'socham*, among them, and its placement at the end of the *pasuk*. It is almost as if the Torah is conveying to us the criterion for *kanaus*, zealousness: it must be *b'socham*, among them. Simply, this implies that the *kanai* should view himself as being “among them,” a member of the community, a brother who is acting out of love and obligation – not anger and animus. The following vignette underscores this idea:

My nephew recently undertook a *shlichus*, mission, from the *Gerrer Rebbe, Shlita*, to establish a *Gerrer* community in Dimona, *Eretz Yisrael* (southern part of the country, near Arad, *Yam Hamelech* and Be'er Sheva). He arrived with a *Kollel* of young men with him in the role of *Rosh*, leader and guide. The community grew quickly, and, in a short while, the building which they were renting to serve as *bais hamedrash* and *shul* was no longer practical. While they had not yet located a suitable alternative, *Shabbos* services were held in a nearby *mamlachti* high school building. The *mamlachti* government schools are not *chareidi*, Orthodox, and the majority of their student body have minimal understanding of the Torah (both letter and spirit). As a result, members of the student bodies have very little commitment to Jewish law and its traditions. Many of these students are either afraid of *chareidim* or, due to a lack of familiarity with us and our way of life, have developed an open bitterness, cultivated by years of hostile indoctrination by their leadership.

On a given Friday night following *Kabollas Shabbos* services, my nephew left *shul* late and noticed a group of teenagers playing basketball. To them, Friday night was just another night of the week. He walked over, dressed in his *chassidic* garb, sporting a *spodek* (Polish *Shtreimel*), and asked them if they would like to have some *kugel*. They could not believe that this *chareidi* Jew was addressing them as human beings. Sure, they would like some *kugel*. Perhaps, they would like to recite a *berachah*, he asked, to which most agreed. This encounter continued for a number of weeks until one of them asked to join the services. Slowly, others either joined or came afterwards for *kiddush* and *kugel*. Did they become *frum*? Will they become *frum*? We are not there yet. Their animus, however, was tempered because someone decided to employ passive *kanaus*, *b'socham*, among them – not against them.

אשר יצא לפניהם ואשר יבא לפניהם ואשר יוציאם ואשר יביאם ולא תהיה עדת ה' כצאן אשר אין להם רעה

Who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd. (27:17)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* asked Hashem to appoint his successor, presenting criteria for an effective leader, a person: who leads from the front; who takes the nation out and brings them in; who does not remain in the background. He then adds, “And let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd.” *Horav Aryeh Finkel, zl (Rosh Yeshivah Mir/Brachfeld)*, wonders why Moshe had to supplement his request for a leader with a comparison to a herd of sheep who are shepherdless. Was not his request sufficient in its own right, without the added analogy about sheep? The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that, indeed, Moshe was not referring to an analogy in order to impress upon Hashem that a competent leader was vital to the nation's stability and forward growth. Moshe sought to instill the concept in himself, to underscore the need for a strong leader that would lead, because otherwise the nation would be rudderless, much like a herd of sheep without its shepherd.

Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita, supplements this with the *Malbim's* commentary, *Ka'tzvo asher ein lahem roeh*, “Like sheep that have no shepherd.” Veritably, if for some reason the shepherd were to become lost or AWOL, the sheep would still have somewhat of a leader to guide them. The he-goat would “step in” and lead. While this may sound good on paper, the *tayash*, he-goat, is not much of a leader, because, after all is said and done, he is also a member of the herd and possesses the same level of intelligence as the other sheep. A leader must have *seichel*, be prudent, and possess common sense and intelligence. A leader must tower over his flock. In the human sphere of endeavor, a leader must be the repository of *ruach Elokim*, the spirit of Hashem, thus serving as the conduit that inspires spiritual growth. He must have the *seichel*, common sense, critical to understanding his flock and how to convey Hashem's message to them. The appropriate leader channels the *dvar Hashem*, word of G-d, through his *daas Torah*, wisdom developed and honed by the Torah. Moshe *Rabbeinu* feared that *Klal Yisrael* would appoint its own leader from among its ranks, who had similar interests, goals and objectives as they did. This would be a recipe for disaster. Hashem decided that Yehoshua was a perfect fit who could step into the shoes of his venerable *Rebbe*, Moshe, and lead the nation on the next leg of its journey.

Horav Avraham Farbstein, zl (Rosh Yeshivah Chevron), explains that herein lay Korach's contention to Moshe. He claimed that, while it is true that the nation needed leadership, once they received the Torah all together, “All the nation was holy” – In other words, they

could go at it alone. It was not necessary to have a leader to lord over them. *Horav Chaim Brim, zl*, opines that the core principle of Korach's position concerning *Kehunah* and *malchus*, the Priesthood and monarchy, was inaccurate. His perception of these two positions/functions in *Klal Yisrael* was viewed/based on his looking through the lens of physicality. His fallacious claims that *malchus* could be bestowed on anyone and that *Kehunah* was a position that was "dispensed" gratuitously without lineage or worthiness indicated how off base he was. Spirituality and physicality are irrevocably dissimilar and, under no circumstances, co-equal. *Rav Chaim* adds, "Anyone who is *moser nefesh*, sacrifices himself (time, energy, emotion, spirituality), for *Klal Yisrael* will be *zocheh*, merit, to achieve distinction with *siyata diShmaya*. He is valued by Hashem, because of what he has given up for His children.

ומנחתם ונסכיהם לפרים לאלים ולכבשים במספרם כמשפט

And their meal-offering and their libations for the bulls, the rams, and the lambs, in their proper numbers, as required. (29:18)

Simply, *v'niskeihem*, "and their libations," refers to the libations of the two sheep of the *Korban Tamid*, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. *Chazal (Taanis 2b)* note the Torah twice departs from the singular form, *v'niska*, which is used in five *pesukim*, one time in the above *pasuk*, where it is spelled *v'niskeihem*, in the plural (with an added "mem" at the end of the word). Also, in *pasuk 31*, the Torah writes *U'nesachecha* with an added *yud*. To add to the equation, we note the word *k'mishpatam* (*pasuk 33*), while it says *k'mishpat* throughout the *pesukim*. All total, we have three superfluous letters: *mem*, *yud*, *mem*, which together spell the word *mayim*, water. This provides, say *Chazal*, proof that *nisuach ha'mayim* on *Succos* is *min haTorah*, a Biblically ordained *mitzvah*.

Horav Chaim Chaikin, zl (Rosh Yeshivah Aix Les Bains, France), who was a close student of the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*, quotes *Chazal (Berachos 32b)*, who state that after the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, the *Shaarei Tefillah*, Gates of Prayer, were sealed. The *Shaarei Dimah*, Gates of Tears, however, were not. What should a person do (since the Gates of Prayer are sealed)? He should weep during his prayers. Thus, his prayers will find access to Heaven via the tears that accompany his prayers. The *Rosh Yeshivah* relates that a Jew came to the *Chafetz Chaim* and said that he was in dire straits and was in need of the *tzaddik's* blessing. Would the *Chafetz Chaim* daven for him? The *Chafetz Chaim* asked the man if he had personally *davened* to Hashem. The Jew replied in the affirmative. He had prayed, but he had received no response. The *Chafetz Chaim* asked him to bring his *sefer Tehillim* to him from which he had been praying. The sage leafed through the pages and said, "Your *Tehillim* looks good: no stains; no worn-out pages; no indication that you wept during *Tehillim* recital. This is not appropriate

davening. Wait a moment, and let me show you how to pray."

The *Chafetz Chaim* brought a ladder, climbed up to the top of his *sefarim shank*, bookcase, and retrieved an old, worn-out, pages-swollen *Tehillim*. He opened it and showed the man the tear-stains throughout the *Tehillim*. He said, "This is my late mother's *Tehillim* in which she prayed constantly. Every one of her *tefillos* were accompanied by passionate weeping. This, my friend, is the meaning of *davening*."

Tefillah is the act of baring one's soul in supplication to Hashem. *Chanah*, mother of *Shmuel HaNavi*, teaches us that *tefillah* means pouring out one's heart in such fervent prayer that an unsuspecting onlooker might think that the supplicant is drunk, i.e., not in control of his/her faculties. When we think of weeping, we associate it with adult emotions. This does not mean that a child's tears are ineffective. A child who cries with *seichel*, common sense and intelligence, is certainly compelling and undoubtedly leaves an impact both on the world and in Heaven. An innocent child's pure emotions, when expressed properly, can alter a decree. Their tears are the result of a purity of heart that trumps even those of adults. The following vignette conveys the impact that a child can have.

Horav David Segal, zl, better known as his *nom de plume*, named after his *magnum opus*, *Turei Zahav, Taz*, escaped from Poland during *Tach v'Tat*, the pogroms that devastated Eastern Europe in 1648/1649. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered by the maniacal hordes of *Bogdan Chmielnicki*, a Ukrainian Cossack, who led a peasant uprising against Polish rule. In every battle, the Jews are the ones who become subject to the brunt of the destruction. This time was no different. The *Taz* and his *Rebbetzin* escaped in the nick of time, traveling far across Europe to a community that, although the residents had heard of the *Taz*, had never met him. The *Gaon* wanted to live under a cloak of anonymity so that he could devote himself to Torah study without any disturbance. He sought to retire from public exposure. For a source of income, he worked in the local kosher slaughterhouse as a *menaker*, removing the *gid ha'nashe*, sciatic nerve/sinew, and the accompanying fats from the hind portion of a cow/bull.

The *Rav* of the community where the *Taz* had taken up residence was far from erudite. Nonetheless, since this community was far from the established European Torah centers, as long as he knew more than his congregation, he qualified to serve as *rav*. Since he was unschooled in the laws of *issur v'heter, kashrus*, he took the easy way out. When he was presented with a question regarding the *kashrus* of a piece of meat or chicken, he would reply, "I suggest that you do not eat it. There are too many issues involved." Thus, he protected himself from rendering a non-kosher piece of meat kosher. The poor members of the community, however, could not afford to accept the

stringencies arising from his lack of knowledge. The *Taz* could not tolerate this. As a result, he began to issue his *psakim*, rulings, concerning the meat. Soon, the people became aware of the brilliant *menaker* who worked in the slaughterhouse, and they all began to turn to him for his rulings. Clearly, this did not sit well with the *rav*.

In those days, *rabbanim* had a privileged relationship with the ruling government. As a result, the *Rav* had permission to punish the *Taz* for overstepping his bounds and acting as rabbinic arbiter of Jewish law, when he was only a *menaker*. He had the *Taz* placed in a sort of cage, and the members of the community would pass by and look at the sinner who had offended the *rav*. While the *Taz* was imprisoned in the cage, he noticed a young girl pass, weeping incessantly. She was carrying a dead chicken in her hands. He called out to her, “Why are you weeping?” The girl tearfully explained that her family was very poor. They had saved their pennies with the hope of purchasing a chicken, which they did. When it was slaughtered, however, a questionable blemish was discovered. She ran to the *Rav* to render his ruling concerning the chicken’s *kashrus*. The *rav* replied that it was best not to eat it.

Now, they had no money and no chicken. The *Taz* asked to look at the chicken and discovered that it was kosher. Indeed, he had himself written about such a *shailah*, question, in his *Taz* commentary. Knowing that the *rav* would never accept the ruling of a “disgraced” person, he told the girl to return to the *rav* and informed him that the *Taz* rules that such a blemish is kosher. He told the girl the exact citation.

The child went to the *rav*, who was basically not a bad person – just terribly insecure. He looked up the *Taz* and acknowledged that the young girl was correct. He asked who had informed her of this *Taz*, and she told him, “The man in the cage.” The *Rav* then realized that he had erred egregiously by disgracing the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation. He publicly apologized to the *Taz* and asked for his forgiveness. The *Taz*’s secret was out, his greatness revealed. His wife, who together with him, had done everything to conceal their true identities asked, “You were so careful. What provoked you to speak to the girl which led to your secret getting out?” He explained, “The girl walked by weeping unremittingly. I could not ignore a child’s tears!”

Va’ani Tefillah

כי שמע ד’ קול בכי – ***Ki shoma Hashem kol bichyee. For Hashem has heard the sound of my weeping.***

There used to be a time when weeping came naturally and people did not suppress their tears out of embarrassment. There once was a time when weeping was commonly heard in the *shul* – especially in the *ezras nashim*, women’s section. *Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, quotes *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, who related that he remembered when women would break down in bitter weeping during *Bircas HaChodesh Elul*. David *Hamelech*

teaches us that *b’chi*, weeping, is a powerful expression of a person’s pain and anguish. This is especially true and effective when one cries for the honor of Heaven and the desecration of Hashem’s Name. These tears have no end. Some of us express our pain by calling out and battling those who undermine the Almighty. If they would invest their time in weeping, they would achieve greater success. When a person’s prayer is accompanied by copious weeping, he merits to receive a positive response to his request. It is all in the presentation. If one truly believes, his emotion shows.

*In loving memory of our parents and brother
Cy and Natalie Handler*

The three-week period between Shiva Asar B’Tammuz and Tisha B’Av is kept by Klal Yisrael as a time of mourning. In this article, we will review and explain the halachos that apply during the Three Weeks. In a subsequent article, we hope to review the halachos that apply during the Nine Days that begin with Rosh Chodesh Av.

Explaining the Laws of the Three Weeks by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

WHAT HAPPENED ON SHIVAH ASAR BETAMMUZ?

The Mishnah (Ta’anis 26) teaches that five tragic events occurred on the 17th day of Tammuz:

1. The *luchos* (tablets) containing the *Aseres Hadibros* were destroyed.
2. The daily *korbanos* offered in the First *Beis Hamikdash* were stopped (see Rambam, *Hilchos Ta’anis* 5:2).
3. The walls of the city of *Yerushalayim* were breached, leading to the destruction of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* (Ta’anis 28b).
4. The wicked *Apostomus*, a Greek officer, burned the Torah near a bridge in *Eretz Yisrael*, during the period of the second *Beis Hamikdash* (see Talmud *Yerushalmi* and *Tiferes Yisrael*).
5. An idol was placed inside the *Beis Hamikdash*. According to *Rashi*, this was done by the evil King *Menashe*. Others explain that this incident occurred during the Second *Beis Hamikdash* time period (Rambam, *Hilchos Ta’anis* 5:2). These two interpretations reflect two opinions recorded in the Talmud *Yerushalmi*.

To commemorate these tragic events, the Jewish people observe the 17th of Tammuz as a fast day (see *Rosh Hoshanah* 18b; Rambam, *Hilchos Ta’anis* 5:1-4). In addition, the custom developed to observe some mourning practices from this day until *Tisha B’Av*. This three-week season is referred to by the *Midrash Rabbah* (*Eicha* 1:3) as the period of *Bein Hametzarim*.

It is noteworthy that neither the Mishnah nor the *Gemara* associate any mourning practices with the *Bein Hametzarim* period. Rather, the Mishnah mentions that the mourning of the *Tisha B’Av* season begins on *Rosh Chodesh Av* by “decreasing *simcha*” (Ta’anis 26b). The

Mishnah does not explain what activities are curtailed in order to decrease simcha.

The Gemara (Yevamos 43a, as explained by the Ramban and Tur; cf. Rashi, who understands the Gemara differently) refers to four activities that are prohibited during this period, presumably to manifest this decreasing of simcha:

1. Business activity is decreased. (There is a dispute among poskim what types of business activity are intended; see Mishnah Berurah 551:11.)

2. Construction and planting for a simcha are not done (Yerushalmi, Ta'anis, cited by Tosafos, Yevamos 43a s.v. Milisa).

3. Weddings are not conducted. (An additional reason is cited to forbid weddings during these nine days: since this is not a good season for Jews, one should postpone a wedding to a more auspicious date [Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 551; Magen Avraham 551:8].)

4. One may not make a festive meal to celebrate an erusin. This was the approximate equivalent to our making a tenaim or vort to celebrate an engagement. The Gemara permits making the erusin, itself, provided one does not make a festive meal to celebrate it. It is permitted to become engaged during the Nine Days, and even on Tisha B'Av itself (Magen Avraham 551:10; Tur, quoting Rav Nissim; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 551:2).

Although the Mishnah and Gemara make no mention of beginning the mourning period any earlier than Rosh Chodesh Av, accepted minhag Ashkenaz is to begin the aveilus from the 17th of Tammuz. Thus, the Rema (Darkei Moshe, Orach Chayim 551:5 and Hagahos 551:2) reports that Ashkenazim do not make weddings during the entire period of the Three Weeks, a practice that has become accepted by many Sefardic communities (Knesses Hagedolah; Ben Ish Chai, Parshas Devarim #4). However, many Sefardic communities permit making a wedding until Rosh Chodesh Av, and, under certain circumstances, even later (Shu't Yabia Omer 6:Orach Chayim #43. See also Sedei Chemed Vol. 5, pg. 279 #14 who states that it depends on the custom of the community.)

MAY ONE SCHEDULE A VORT DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

It is permitted to celebrate an engagement during the Three Weeks, provided there is no music or dancing (Magen Avraham 551:10). Until Rosh Chodesh, one is allowed to celebrate the engagement with a festive meal (Mishnah Berurah 551:19), but from Rosh Chodesh, one should serve only light refreshments (Magen Avraham 551:10).

IS DANCING PERMITTED DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

Most dancing is prohibited during the Three Weeks (Magen Avraham 551:10; Elyah Rabbah 551:6; Mishnah Berurah 551:16). However, there are authorities who permit dancing at a sheva brachos.

MAY ONE GET MARRIED ON THE NIGHT OF THE 17TH OF TAMMUZ?

When the 17th of Tammuz falls out during the week, one who chooses to get married on this day should begin the wedding on the daytime of the 16th. There are poskim who contend that this is permitted only under extenuating circumstances (Piskei Teshuvos 551: 7 footnote 51).

When the 17th falls out on Sunday, most poskim prohibit making a wedding on the night of the 17th (Motza'ei Shabbos), since they consider that the period of mourning begins already at night (Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 10:26). Many poskim contend that the night of the 17th should be treated even more strictly than the Three Weeks; it should be treated with the stringencies of the Nine Days (Elyah Rabbah; Shu't Chayim Sha'al #24; Biur Halacha 551:2). However, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that, under extenuating circumstances, it is permitted to schedule a wedding on the Motza'ei Shabbos of the 17th of Tammuz (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:168).

WHAT ARE THE LAWS ABOUT HAVING HAIRCUTS AND SHAVING DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

The Mishnah (Ta'anis 26b) rules that it is prohibited to cut one's hair from the Motza'ei Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av until Tisha B'Av. (These days are referred to as "shavua shechal bo Tisha B'Av", the week in which Tisha B'Av falls. We will refer to these days as "the week of Tisha B'Av.") This includes both shaving one's beard and getting a haircut (Ran). Thus, according to the takkanah of Chazal, it was permitted to have a haircut or shave up until a few days before Tisha B'Av. However, the Rema notes that the custom among Ashkenazim is that we do not cut our hair during the entire Three Weeks (Darkei Moshe, Orach Chayim 551:5 and Hagahos 551:4).

There are different customs among Sefardim regarding having haircuts during the Three Weeks. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim (551:3) rules that it is prohibited to have a haircut only in the week of Tisha B'Av, as is recorded in the Gemara, and this is the Sefardic practice according to Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu't Yechaveh Daas 4:36). However, other Sefardic poskim note that it is dependent on custom (Ben Ish Chai, Parshas Devorim #12)

Rav Ovadia Yosef paskens that Sefardic bachurim learning in an Ashkenazic yeshiva are permitted to shave until Rosh Chodesh. Even though most of the students in the yeshiva follow the Ashkenazic practice of not shaving during the entire Three Weeks, it is permitted for the Sefardim to follow their custom and shave (Shu't Yechaveh Daas 4:36). Although there is a general rule that a community should follow one halachic practice, this is true when the community has one rav or follows the guidance of one beis din. However, Sefardim and Ashkenazim are considered communities with different rabbonim and batei din; therefore, each community may follow its own halachically accepted practice (Yevamos 14a).

There are a few exceptions to the ruling regarding when Ashkenazim are permitted to shave or get a haircut during the Three Weeks. For example, it is permitted to trim one's mustache, if it interferes with eating (Ran; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 551:13).

Shu't Chasam Sofer (Yoreh Deah #348 s.v. Ve'i golach) rules that a person who shaves every day is permitted to shave on Friday during the Three Weeks, in honor of Shabbos. Furthermore, he also implies that someone who is very uncomfortable because of his beard stubble is permitted to shave during the Three Weeks, except for the week of Tisha B'Av (see She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 122:5). Both of these rulings are controversial, and one should not rely on them without receiving a pesak from a rav.

Rav Moshe Feinstein permits shaving during the Three Weeks, if someone may lose his job or may lose customers because he does not shave. However, if the only concern is that people will make fun of him, he is not permitted to shave. Rav Moshe Feinstein contends that when the prohibition against shaving is only because of minhag (as it is prior to the week of Tisha B'Av), there is no minhag to prohibit shaving if he will suffer financially as a result. However, if he will suffer only embarrassment or harassment, but no loss of income, he is required to remain unshaven.

In any case, shaving is prohibited during the week of Tisha B'Av not because of minhag but because of takkanas chachomim, which forbids shaving, even if one suffers financial loss (Shu't Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 1:93 and Orach Chayim 4:102).

If a bris falls out during the Three Weeks, the father of the baby, the mohel and the sandek are permitted to shave or have a haircut (Shu't Chasam Sofer, Orach Chayim #158). The Chasam Sofer permits a haircut and shave even during the week of Tisha B'Av, whereas other poskim disagree and permit this only until the week of Tisha B'Av (Shu't Noda Biyehudah 1:28; Sha'arei Teshuvah; Sedei Chemed 5:278:3) or only until Rosh Chodesh (Be'er Heiteiv 551:3). Some poskim permit a haircut or shave only on the day of the bris itself (Shu't Noda Biyehudah 1:28). According to some authorities, the kvatter and the sandek me'umad (also called "amidah lebrachos") are also permitted to shave and have a haircut (She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha, Kuntrus Acharon 120:8, based on Elyah Rabbah 551:27 and Beis Meir, Orach Chayim 551). However, most poskim do not permit them to shave, and restrict the heter of shaving and haircutting in honor of the bris to the mohel, the sandek, and the father of the baby.

Adults may not give children a haircut during the week of Tisha B'Av (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 551:14). The poskim disagree whether a minor may have a haircut during the part of the Three Weeks before Shabbos Chazon. Some contend that since the prohibition against haircuts during these weeks is only a custom, children are

not included (Mishnah Berurah 551:82, quoting Chayei Adam), whereas others rule that children are included (Elyah Rabbah 551:28).

Although some poskim permit scheduling an upsheren (chalukah) during the Three Weeks, if that is when the child's birthday is, the prevalent practice is to postpone the upsheren until after Tisha B'Av (Piskei Teshuvos 551:44).

Some recent poskim have suggested that a bar mitzvah bachur who needs a haircut may have one during the Three Weeks, as long as it is not during the week of Tisha B'Av. The She'arim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha concludes that it is more acceptable, halachically, for the bar mitzvah to have a haircut the day before he turns bar mitzvah and rely on the opinion that a minor may have a haircut during the Three Weeks, before the week of Tisha B'Av (Kuntrus Acharon 120:8).

The authorities disagree as to whether a woman may have her hair cut during the Three Weeks. Mishnah Berurah rules that a woman may not have her hair cut during the week of Tisha B'Av. He suggests that it may be permitted for her to trim the hair on the temples (Mishnah Berurah 551:79). Many poskim rule that a woman may tweeze her eyebrows and perform similar cosmetic activities, even during the week of Tisha B'Av (see Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 2:137; Halichos Beisah, Chapter 25, footnote 70).

MAY I CLIP MY FINGERNAILS DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

It is permitted to clip fingernails during the Three Weeks, according to all opinions. There is a dispute whether one can clip nails during the week of Tisha B'Av (Magen Avraham, 551:11 permits, whereas Taz, Orach Chayim 551:13 and Elyah Rabbah 551:7 prohibit).

WHAT ARE THE HALACHOS ABOUT PLAYING AND LISTENING TO MUSIC DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

Playing or listening to music for enjoyment is prohibited during the Three Weeks (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim Vol. 4:21:4). Many poskim prohibit listening even to recorded music (Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 15:33).

It is permitted to play music for non-Jews for parnasah or to teach music for parnasah, until the week of Tisha B'Av (Biur Halacha to 551:2 s.v. Memaatima, based on Pri Megadim). Similarly, it is permitted to take music lessons that are for parnasah. Some poskim permit taking lessons, if the lessons are not for pleasure and there will be a loss of skill because of the time lost (Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 16:19). However, the Kaf Hachayim (551:41) writes: "Those who teach music during these days should teach sad songs, and it would be even better if they did not teach any music at all."

IS SINGING PERMITTED DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

Sedei Chemed discusses this question (Volume 5, page 376:10). He feels that it is permitted, but quotes sources

who seem to forbid it, and therefore is inconclusive. It is permitted to sing sad or moving songs, similar to what we sing on Tisha B'Av. Since it is uncertain that it is prohibited, one need not tell someone who is singing that he is doing something halachically wrong.

MAY ONE RECITE SHEHECHEYANU DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

There are three opinions among the poskim:

1. Shehecheyanu should not be recited during the Three Weeks, even on Shabbos (Arizal);
2. Shehecheyanu should not be recited on weekdays, but may be recited on Shabbos (Sefer Chassidim #840);
3. Shehecheyanu may be recited even on weekdays (Taz and Gra, Orach Chayim 551:17).

Most halachic authorities rule like the middle opinion, permitting shehecheyanu to be recited on Shabbos, but not on weekdays (Magen Avraham, Elyah Rabbah, Chayei Adam; Mishnah Berurah). In general, laws of mourning do not apply on Shabbos. Thus, shehecheyanu may be recited on Shabbos. (Rav Akiva Eiger rules that shehecheyanu may also be recited on Rosh Chodesh.)

An alternative approach to explain this opinion contends that it is a mitzvah to benefit from the world and make a shehecheyanu. Fulfilling this mitzvah supersedes the concern about reciting shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks—but it is appropriate to push it off to Shabbos (Mekor Chessed commentary to Sefer Chassidim #840; based on Yerushalmi at end of Kiddushin).

According to the Ari, the reason for not saying a shehecheyanu is not on account of the mourning, but because it is inappropriate to recite a blessing that we should be rejuvenated to this time, which is a very inauspicious period. This reason not to recite shehecheyanu applies even on Shabbos (Magen Avraham; Shu't Chayim Sha'al #24).

The Gra contends that no halachic source prohibits a mourner from reciting shehecheyanu. Apparently, he also disagrees with the reason attributed to the Ari.

MAY ONE RECITE SHEHECHEYANU ON THE NIGHT OF THE 17TH?

Most poskim hold that one should not (Shu't Chayim Sha'al #24; Sedei Chemed Vol. 5, pg. 277; Biur Halacha 551:2). However, Rav Moshe Feinstein contends that the mourning period does not start until morning, implying that one may recite a shehecheyanu at night (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:168).

MAY A CHILD RECITE SHEHECHEYANU DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

This depends on the age and maturity of the child. If the child is old enough to appreciate the aveilus that is observed, then we should train him not to say shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks. However, if he or she is not old enough to appreciate the aveilus, but is old enough to recite the shehecheyanu, one may allow him or her to recite the shehecheyanu (Birkei Yosef, Orach

Chayim 551:9). There is no need to be concerned that the child is wishing this season to return.

Mishnah Berurah (511:99) permits a pregnant woman or an ill person to eat a new fruit without reciting the shehecheyanu.

According to all opinions, one recites a shehecheyanu when performing the mitzvos of pidyon haben or bris milah (for those who recite a shehecheyanu at a bris). The Rema rules that one may also recite a shehecheyanu on a new fruit that will not be available after Tisha B'Av. Otherwise, one should wait until after Tisha B'Av to eat the fruit or to buy the clothing upon which one would recite shehecheyanu. It is permitted to purchase clothes that do not require a shehecheyanu.

MAY ONE PURCHASE A NEW CAR DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that if the car is being purchased for pleasure or convenience, one should wait until after the Three Weeks to buy it. If, however, it is necessary for parnasah, one may purchase it during the Three Weeks, but one should not recite shehecheyanu until after the Three Weeks (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 3:80). Some poskim permit buying any necessary appliance, such as a refrigerator or washing machine, to replace one that broke during the Three Weeks (Piskei Teshuvos 551:11).

OTHER HALACHOS OF THE THREE WEEKS

One should not engage in dangerous activities during the Three Weeks (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 551:18). For this reason, some do not schedule elective surgery until after Tisha B'Av (Piskei Teshuvos 551:1).

One may bathe, shower, go swimming or go to the beach between the 17th of Tammuz and Rosh Chodesh Av, even if one has not gone swimming yet this season. Although people say that one may not go swimming for the first time during the Three Weeks, there is no halachic source for this practice. It is, therefore, not considered a binding custom, and it is permitted without hataras nedarim (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 2:263).

Some forbid hikes, trips to the beach and other entertaining activities during the Three Weeks (see Sedei Chemed, Vol. 5, pg. 376:10). Some authorities suggest not swimming in dangerous places or in water deeper than one's height (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 2:263).

FOCUS OF THE THREE WEEKS

The most important aspect of the Three Weeks is to focus on the tremendous loss we suffer because of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. Some tzaddikim make a point of reciting tikkun chatzos, wherein we mourn the galus of the Shechina, every night..

Some Sefardic communities in Yerushalayim have the custom to sit on the floor, just after midday, on each day of the Three Weeks, and recite part of tikkun chatzos. To further convey this mood, Yesod Veshoresh Ha'avodah prohibits any laughing and small talk during these weeks,

just as a mourner may not engage in laughter or small talk (Sha'ar 9, Chapter 11-12).

Although we may not be on such a spiritual level, we certainly should contemplate the tremendous loss in our spiritual lives without the Beis Hamikdash. Let us pray intently for the restoration of the Beis Hamikdash and the return of the Divine Presence to Yerushalayim, speedily in our days!

**Are Jews Treated Differently?
On the Ultimate Meaning of Jewish Existence
Rabbi YY Jacobson**

Jerusalem

Balaam's Prose

It is fascinating that some of the most splendid prose in the Hebrew Bible emerges from the mouth of Balaam, a brilliant poet, a prophet, and an archenemy of the Jewish people, who, summoned by the Moabite king to curse Israel, ends up delivering the most poignant poetry ever uttered about the history and destiny of the Jewish people (1).

"From the top of mountains I see him from the hills I behold him; It is a people that dwells alone, And is not reckoned among the nations..."

"How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob; Your dwellings, O Israel! As winding brooks, as gardens by the river's side; like aloes which G-d has planted, like cedars beside the waters..."

"They crouch, they lie down like a lion and a lioness; who dare rouse them? Blessed is he that blesses you, And cursed is he that curses you..."

Even more interesting is the fact that the most explicit reference in the five books of Moses to Moshiach, the Jewish leader who will bring about the full and ultimate redemption, when heaven and earth will kiss and humanity will become one, is to be found in Balaam's prose: "I see it, but not now; I behold it, but it is not near. A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise up from Israel..."

This is strange. The identity, nature, and calling of the Jewish people are naturally discussed throughout the Torah. Yet the most acute, potent, and finely tuned appreciation of Jewish identity is communicated through the mouth of a non-Jewish prophet who loathes Israel and attempts to destroy it. Why?

Clarity of Vision

The message, I believe, is quite clear. The Torah is teaching us that if you wish to understand who the Jew is, you must at times seek the perspective of the non-Jew. The non-Jewish individual, who is unbiased and unaffected by the "Jewish complex" and its inclination toward self-depreciation, sometimes possesses a keener appreciation of the Jew than many Jews themselves.

The non-Jewish world does not fall prey to the popular Jewish claim that we are a "normal secular people," a "cultural ethnic group" that enjoys love, money, food, and

leisure as much as any good goy (gentile) in the world. It makes us uncomfortable, but consciously or subconsciously, the gentile senses that something very profound and authentic sets the Jew apart from the rest of other nations. Although he or she may not be able to put his or her finger on what exactly that otherness is, the non-Jew feels that Israel "is a people that dwells alone, and is not reckoned among the nations."

A Peculiar People

Eric Hoffer, an American social philosopher, author of the classic "The True Believer" and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, expressed Balaam's sentiments in a Los Angeles Times article decades ago.

It is tragically clear that almost nothing changed since Mr. Hoffer wrote these words in May of 1968.

"The Jews are a peculiar people: things permitted to other nations are forbidden to the Jews. Other nations drive out thousands, even millions of people and there is no refugee problem. Russia did it, Poland and Czechoslovakia did it, Turkey threw out a million Greeks, and Algeria a million Frenchmen. Indonesia threw out heaven knows how many Chinese — and no one says a word about refugees. But in the case of Israel, the displaced Arabs have become eternal refugees. Everyone insists that Israel must take back every single Arab. Arnold Toynbee called the displacement of the Arabs an atrocity greater than any committed by the Nazis."

"Other nations when victorious on the battlefield dictate peace terms. But when Israel is victorious it must sue for peace. Everyone expects the Jews to be the only real Christians in this world."

"Other nations when they are defeated survive and recover but should Israel be defeated it would be destroyed. Had Nasser triumphed last June he would have wiped Israel off the map, and no one would have lifted a finger to save the Jews."

"No commitment to the Jews by any government, including our own, is worth the paper it is written on. There is a cry of outrage all over the world when people die in Vietnam or when two Negroes are executed in Rhodesia. But when Hitler slaughtered Jews no one remonstrated with him. The Swedes, who are ready to break off diplomatic relations with America because of what we do in Vietnam, did not let out a peep when Hitler was slaughtering Jews. They sent Hitler choice iron ore, and ball bearings, and serviced his troop trains to Norway."

"The Jews are alone in the world. If Israel survives, it will be solely because of Jewish efforts."

"Yet at this moment Israel is our only reliable and unconditional ally. We can rely more on Israel than Israel can rely on us. And one has only to imagine what would have happened last summer had the Arabs and their Russian backers won the war to realize how vital the survival of Israel is to America and the West in general."

"I have a premonition that will not leave me; as it goes with Israel so will it go with all of us. Should Israel perish the holocaust will be upon us."

Three Non-Jewish Perspectives

In his book "The Meaning of History," Nikolai Berdyaev wrote the following about the meaning of Jewish history:

"I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint. And, indeed, according to the materialistic and positivistic criterion, this people ought long ago to have perished."

Here are the splendid words of the great Russian novelist, Leo Nikolaevitch Tolstoy, who wrote this in 1908 about the Jewish people:

"The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illuminated with it the entire world. He is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions. The Jew is the emblem of eternity. He, who neither slaughter nor torture of thousands of years could destroy, he who neither fire, nor sword, nor Inquisition was able to wipe off the face of the earth. He, who was the first to produce the Oracles of God. He, who has been for so long the Guardian of Prophecy and has transmitted it to the rest of the world. Such a nation cannot be destroyed. The Jew is as everlasting as Eternity itself."

And here is a passage by contemporary historian Paul Johnson:

"All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jew has this gift. To them, we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews, it might have been a much emptier place."

And, of course, the immortal words of Nineteenth-century American president John Adams:

"I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize man than any other nation. If I were an atheist who believed or pretended to believe that all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance has ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization."

Another Non-Jewish philosopher, Peter Kreeft, wrote these words: "The prophetic spirit of the Jew finds a meaning and a purpose in history, thereby transforming mankind's

understanding of history. Their genius for finding meaning everywhere -- for example in science and in the world of nature -- can be explained in only two ways: either they were simply smarter than anyone else, or it was G-d's doing, not theirs. The notion of the chosen people is really the humblest possible interpretation of their history."

A Confession

Some years ago, in his Rosh Hashanah sermon at Temple Israel in Natick, Mass., best-selling author Rabbi Harold Kushner made this candid confession:

"This past year [of terrorism and anti-Semitism] has compelled me to come to conclusions I didn't want to come to. For all of my years as a rabbi, I have believed and I have taught that Jews were no different from other people, that Judaism was different from Christianity and Islam, but Jews had the same feelings, the same strengths, and weaknesses, the same fears, and dreams that Christians and Muslims have. I took issue with the Chabad rabbis who argued that Jewish souls are essentially different than gentile souls.

"I opposed and discouraged interfaith marriage, not because I believed that Jews were better than non-Jews but because a family with two religions was likely to raise children with no religion to avoid arguments."

"But this year has persuaded me that Jews are in fact different. I find myself compelled to face the fact that the Jew plays the role for the world that the canary used to play for the coal miners. You've read about how the miners would take canaries with them into the mines because the canaries were extremely sensitive to dangerous gases. They responded to danger before the humans did. So if the miners saw the canaries get sick and pass out, they knew that the air was bad and they would escape as fast as they could.

"That's what we Jews do for the world. We are the world's early warning system. Where there is evil, where there is hatred, it affects us first. If there is hatred anywhere in the world, it will find us. If there is evil somewhere in the world, we will become its target. People overflowing with hatred for whatever reason, including self-hatred, make us the objects of their hatred.

"This is the role we play in the world, not by choice but imposed on us by others, to be the miner's canary, to smoke out the bigots, the haters, the people who will be a menace to their communities if someone doesn't stop them, and we identify them early on by their hatred of us.

"Hitler attacked Jews before he attacked western civilization, and that should have alerted the world to what kind of person he was, but the world misread the signal. Muslim fanatics practiced their terrorist skills on Israelis before turning those skills on the rest of the world, but the world never understood the warning.

"Our job is to live as Jews were summoned to live, because we can't escape the fate of being a Jew. Generations before us have tried and failed. We can claim the destiny of being

a Jew; because when we do that, we discover how satisfying a truly human life can be."

G-d's Witnesses

But why are the Jews the canaries of the world? What exactly placed the Jewish people in this position? This was well articulated by Professor Eliezer Berkovits in his book Faith After the Holocaust:

"The fear that so many different civilizations have of the Jew, the suspicion with which he is met, is utterly irrational, yet it has its justification. It is utterly irrational because it has no basis in the behavior of the Jew or in his character. It is a form of international madness when it is founded on a belief in Jewish power and Jewish intention to hurt, to harm, or to rule.

"Yet it has its justification as a metaphysical fear of the staying power of Jewish powerlessness. The very existence of the Jewish people is suggestive of another dimension of reality and meaning in which the main preoccupation of the man of "power history" is adjudged futile and futureless in the long run... As long as the Jew is around, he is a witness that G-d is around. He is the witness, whether he knows it or not, whether he consciously testifies or refuses to testify.

"His very existence, his survival, his impact, testifies to G-d's existence. That he is here, that he is present, bears witness to G-d's presence in history. There lies the origin of the satanic idea of the Final Solution. If the witness were destroyed, G-d Himself would be dead."

Embracing Ourselves

Many of our beloved brothers and sisters, young and old progressive and open-minded Jews, raised in the spirit of egalitarianism and equality, have for a long time attempted

to suppress this historical truth. We have tried hard to convince ourselves and our children that we were equals with the nations of the earth; that we were seen as part of the collective family of the human race. Anti-Semitism, we told ourselves, was a relic of the past, existing in backward countries not permeated with the spirit of liberty. And if it did exist today, it is because Israel has sinned badly.

Yet the virulent anti-Semitism resurrected during the past decades across the world and the absolutely irrational obsession to demonize Israel (ten of thousands of rockets were sent into Israel with the attempt to murder as many Jews as possible, yet Israel is blamed!), is beginning to open many of our eyes. If you open almost any news website newspaper in the world or watch any television news station internationally, you can hear the message articulated 3,300 years ago by a sophisticated and spiritual non-Jew: "It is a people that dwells alone, And is not reckoned among the nations."

This is not a curse. It is a privilege, and it is a reality. We are the Divine ambassadors of love, light, hope, and truth. If we wish to thrive we must embrace this truth, acknowledged long ago by our fellow non-Jews. The world is embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed with themselves; the world respects Jews who respect themselves. The world is ashamed of an Israel that is apologetic about its 4,000-year faith and tradition that the Holy Land is G-d's gift to the Jews.

Only when we will acknowledge our "aloneness" will we become a true source of blessing to all of humanity.

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה