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Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
VAEYIRA 5768

Mazal Tov to Sharona & Uri Meyers on the birth of a girl. Mazal Tov to the grandparents, Shalom and Karyn Feinberg, along with the entire extended family.

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GENERATIONS :: Rabbi Berel Wein

In Jewish life, family generations have always played a prominent role. We are bidden to procreate and create generations, whether through actual biological children, students and disciples, intellectual works and contributions or memories carried on by friends and colleagues. In fact we see ourselves mainly through our generations, through their behavior and accomplishments.

The wisdom of King Solomon taught us that “generations leave and generations come but the world remains forever” – so the task to build the world physically, spiritually and socially always remains. It is the primary challenge of all generations for all time. It is also the never changing challenge that taxes our existence and makes no compromise in its demands upon us.

All of this was made abundantly clear to me this week at the circumcision ceremony for my newest great grandson. The Lord has blessed me, allowing me to see a fourth generation in this handsome (what else?) squalling infant. I think of my father and grandfather, my mother and all of my relatives of previous generations when I see my great grandson. I am reminded of the quip that my teacher in the yeshiva told me almost sixty years ago: “If your grandparents and your grandchildren are both equally proud of you and your accomplishments, then you are probably alright.”

Previous generations make us accountable, whether we wish to be or not. Seeing my great grandchild made me wonder what his opinion of me will be. We are accountable to succeeding generations as well. We all pray to be loved and remembered in a positive vein.

But the judgments of future time and history are not clear to us now, so we can only do our best, follow our traditions and Torah and hope that the future will be kind to us.

There is a tradition of rebellion regarding the relationship of one generation to the previous ones. Nineteenth century Eastern European Jewish life was a hotbed of youthful rebellion against the previous norms and structure of Jewish life. The secularism, assimilation and apathy of Jewish spirit that marks much of our current Jewish society are a product of this discontinuity of generations.

The Holocaust was another major and tragic fraying of the bonds of Jewish generations. Willfully or by negligence, most Jews today lack the bond of generations that is so necessary for meaningful Jewish life and survival. And, it is not only past generations that are missing but future ones as well. Intermarriage, approval of homosexual behavior, smaller numbers of Jewish children, rampant abortions, all combine to diminish hopes for future generations of Jews.

Familial and generational disruptions in Jewish life spell disaster both for the individual and the people of Israel generally. We cannot have Judaism without Jews. So the infant great grandson that I was privileged to hold in my hands this week is really a vote of confidence in the Jewish future and in the eternity of Israel.

One of the outstanding statistics that leap out at one when reading about the years immediately after the Holocaust is the large number of babies born to survivors in the years 1945 to 1948. This creation of Jewish generations under and after the worst of all conditions of human life is the supreme attestation to the eternity and resilience of the Jewish people.

Obviously, generations cannot be judged solely on the basis of quantity and numbers. The role of the individual is always paramount in Jewish life. Even when one is blessed with generations, both previous and succeeding ones, it is up to the individual himself and herself as to the future of the Jewish people. Everyone has to contribute according to one's gifts and talents. Everyone has to feel the responsibility upon one's self and not rely

on one's pedigree of greatness or on the projected achievements or grandchildren or great grandchildren.

Every person eventually is judged by his/her own behavior and actions. Generations are important and great but are not the guarantors of success and achievement. Eisav came from Avraham and Yitzchak and Rabi Akiva came from Senchariv.

The power of the individual to choose one's course in life is never diminished. It may certainly be influenced by the concept of generations that I have discussed here but it is never wholly decided by that concept alone. I along with you pray for healthy, successful, pious generations. But, that has to be earned. May we all merit truly upright Jewish generations.

Shabat Shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYERAH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Most commentators dwell upon the compassion for sinners demonstrated by our father Avraham in this week's parsha. Though this message is undoubtedly the important one, as relating to the tragedy of Sodom, there is an important peripheral lesson, of perhaps equal importance, involved there as well. And that lesson is that a few good people make all the difference in human society and in the fate of mankind.

Sodom is not destroyed because of the thousands or even millions of evildoers in its midst. It was destroyed simply because it lacked ten good people in its society. And this is God's message to Avraham as well. Avraham is a lonely person – he is on one side and everyone else in the world is seemingly on the other side.

Lonely people oftentimes are beset by doubts as to their course in life. “Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong!” But history has shown us time and again that the lonely individual is proven correct and the behavior and opinions of the many are proven to be wrong and even dangerous. Avraham becomes the paradigm for the lonely righteous in a world that envies, imitates and glorifies Sodom. He is the father of the Jewish people especially in this regard.

The Jews are a small and lonely group in our world. Their values and way of life are in opposition to those of the many. Yet even our enemies admit – and in fact object to the prevalence of our contributions, influence and vitality as regards human civilization and history.

The destruction of Sodom leaves a deep imprint on Avraham. It helps shape his attitude towards his son Yitzchak. He eschews the choice of the many – of Yishmael and the children of Keturah – in favor of the lonely good and pious son Yitzchak. That is perhaps the message of God to Avraham when He told him: “For through Yitzchak [alone] will you have true descendants.”

One Yitzchak eventually is able to counter – in God's inscrutable reckoning of merits and salvation millions of evildoers - no matter how well pedigreed those evildoers claim to be. Sodom eventually is destroyed by its own innate lack of goodness and of a dearth of pious citizens. But Avraham and Yitzchak, small in numbers and opposed by most of the world, will continue to flourish and proclaim the values of goodness and righteousness in the general world.

The prophet Yeshayahu characterizes Avraham as “echad” – one, unique, alone, singular. That description is to be interpreted positively and not as a complaint or source of weakness or pessimism. In a world of the many it is the few that really matter. The lord told us long ago in the book of Dvarim that we would be the fewest of all people. Yet in our influence and strength of spirit we are as numerous as are the stars in heaven.

This inner realization of ourselves and our role in God's plan for human existence and growth marks us as the true children of Avraham and gives us hope even in a world where Sodom appears all powerful.

Shabat shalom.

TORAH WEEKLY :: Parshat Vayera
For the week ending 27 October 2007 / 15 Heshvan 5768
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

OVERVIEW

Three days after performing brit mila on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lots wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lots daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

INSIGHTS

Please do not adjust your set, reality is at fault.

"And he (Avraham) was sitting at the entrance of the tent." (18:1)

The elderly lady was sitting in the parking lot. She was obviously very distressed. "Mrs. Cohen," I said, "What's the matter?" She replied trembling, "I don't know where it is! I don't know where it is!" "You don't know where what is?" I asked. "I don't know where my car is! I'm sure I left it here, and it's not here now. Maybe I'm going senile. Maybe I don't know where things are anymore. Maybe I shouldn't drive anymore!"

I thought for a moment.

"Maybe your car has been stolen, Mrs. Cohen."

Her eyes widened. "Do you think so? Oh, I do hope so!"

We called the police, and sure enough her car had been found, stripped to the chassis, in a town on the West Bank.

Sometimes things aren't the way they seem.

"...and he (Avraham) was sitting at the entrance of the tent."

The Midrash reveals to us that Avraham wanted to stand up when G-d appeared to him. G-d said to him, "You sit, and I will stand."

When you go see your bank manager to try and get a loan, you stand and he sits; the one who stands is dependent on the one sits.

When Avraham wanted to stand, G-d told him to sit. G-d was telling Avraham, I depend on you; everything depends on you, not the other way round.

How can this be? How can G-d depend on any creation?

If you look at this world, it seems that above us is only the sky; you would be hard pressed to see the existence of many, many worlds above this one. And yet they exist. Millions of worlds, and, of all of them, ours is the lowest.

And yet, G-d decided that the whole of creation would be governed by what we do in this lowest of the worlds, down here at the bottom of the pile.

When we perform an act of kindness it reverberates all the way to the highest of the highest worlds, and that causes G-d to radiate an influx of blessing back down to this world.

In other words, a kind word may stop an earthquake, or a train collision, or a war.

This is the how we can understand the verse in Tehillim (Psalms) "Give strength to G-d." Man has been given the role of strengthening the creation through his actions, or, G-d forbid, the reverse.

You'd never believe it were so, but sometimes things are not the way they seem.

Based on Da'at Torah and a story heard from Rabbi Mordechai Moshe Epstein.

Written and compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Vayera

And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold, Sarah, your wife, will have a son. (18:10)

The Torah dedicates what seems to be an excessive number of pesukim to detail the wonderful news concerning Sarah Imeinu's impending motherhood. This begins with the three angels that visit Avraham Avinu, in order to notify Sarah that she would bear a son. The angels ask Avraham, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" He responds that "she is in the tent." Afterwards, the angel tells Avraham that Sarah will give birth to a son. The Torah interjects to tell us how old Avraham and Sarah were, so that the reader understands that only a Divine miracle could enable Sarah to give birth. Sarah hears and "laughs" at the impossibility of this occurring. Then we note Hashem's critique, "Is anything beyond Hashem?" Sarah denies her initial response to the news. This is followed later with the news that, indeed, Sarah has just given birth commensurate with the time designated by the angel. This lengthy description and detail of Yitzchak's birth seems superfluous, especially considering how many halachos Chazal derive from each extra letter in the Torah.

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, cites Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl, m'Lublin in his Divrei Sofrim who explains that a Jew should never be me'ya'eish, give up hope. Ha'yipalei mei'Hashem davar? "Is anything beyond Hashem?" (ibid.18:14) should be the believing Jew's motto in life. Nothing is beyond Him. The Torah seeks to emphasize how little hope there was for Sarah to bear a child, and, yet, she did. The Torah is teaching us that we should never give up hope, because nothing stands in Hashem's way. Rav Tzadok adds that just as a Jew should never despair over the lack of physical salvation, so, too, should he not abandon the thought of spiritual salvation. Regardless of how far he has distanced himself from the Torah way; or how deep he has sunk into the muck of moral depravity, he can return and Hashem will welcome him.

The concept of yiush does not apply to the Jewish nation, for it is a people that was founded after all hope had been lost. Avraham and Sarah were barren, past the child-bearing age. No one would have thought twice about Sarah giving birth - even after the angel had told them that this would occur. Sarah laughed, although she knew nothing was impossible for Hashem, but she felt this miracle was unnecessary. Had Hashem wanted her to have a child, she would have had one earlier. There is no reason to create a miracle if it is not necessary.

Sarah did not realize that Hashem chose this moment because of its propitious nature. Particularly now, when all hope for a child had been lost, when no one - even Sarah - believed it would occur, Hashem decided to teach us and the world a lesson: Hayipalei mei'Hashem davar - nothing is beyond the Almighty.

Rav Tzadok adds that the future redemption for which we are all waiting will occur under parallel circumstances, when people will have despaired over the geulah, redemption. As our nation was initiated l'achar yiush, after and beyond hope, so will our redemption materialize under similar circumstances.

Avraham Avinu taught us to never give up. When Lot was taken captive and it seemed impossible to rescue him, Avraham assembled 318 members of his household and pursued Lot's captors. In an alternative explanation, Chazal say only Avraham's trusted servant, Eliezer, whose name has the gematriya, numerical equivalent, of 318, went with him. The name Eliezer implies, Elokei avi b'ezri, va'yatzileini m' cherev Pharaoh. "The G-d of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." (Shemos 18:4) The sword of Pharaoh was already on Moshe's neck. It seemed hopeless, and, specifically at that moment, Hashem came to his aid. Eliezer/318 is the gematriya of yush including the kollel (adding number one, by including the entire word.) Therefore, yush is 317, with the entire word added as one, making it 318. With hope, one drives away yush. A Jew believes in Hashem, and this conviction energizes within him the ability to hope beyond hope, beyond reason.

A life steeped in emunah is an entirely different life than one lived without this sense of faith. The Navi, Chavakuk (2:4) says, "The righteous person lives by his faith." The life of a tzaddik can only be lived with emunah. A life based on such a deep and penetrating faith is what makes him a tzaddik. He lives by a completely different set of rules.

Living according to a different set of rules aptly describes those tzadikim who are bound up with Hashem through their emunah. As the Kaliver Rebbe, Shlita, writes, "These are people who put all of their piety, erudition, and moral greatness at the service of their people." These were individuals who confronted misery and death with equanimity. It was all a part of their avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. This is not a thousand years ago, but as recently as sixty-five to seventy years ago, during the tragic years of persecution when myriads of Jews died while a cultured world stood by and silently turned their heads away in indifference. When the Nazi murderers entered a town, they first sought out its leaders - the rabbis. They would torture these giants of Torah and avodah with all of the cruelty they could muster. These tzadikim, however, paid no attention to their suffering and sanctified Hashem's Name in public, such that at times even the Nazi beasts stood in rapt silence.

One of the giants who miraculously survived the war and merited to rebuild his chassidus in America was Horav Shlomo Halberstam, zl, the Bobover Rebbe. His exploits on behalf of his brethren are legend. We can best describe this individual who was respected, admired and loved by all - regardless of Chassidic affiliation or level of spiritual persuasion and observance - by something he said after he had been saved at the last moment from the Gestapo firing squad.

It was in Neimark, Galicia that the Germans finally caught up with the elusive rabbi. The gentiles watched mirthfully as Rav Shlomo, his young son, Naftali and the Rebbe's sister were being led away in handcuffs to the Gestapo chief. This was it. Their last attempt to escape to Slovakia had failed. It was certain death.

Later on, when the Rebbe spoke about those moments, it was not about his fear of death. What he chose to talk about the most was his backpack and its contents. In it there were: manuscripts of his grandfather's writings; his Tefillin, written by the famous Rav Moshe of Pshevorsk; and the notebook containing the transcription of seven hundred articles by his saintly father. Each of these items was his "provisions" that he had packed in preparation for his meeting with the Gestapo chief.

The Rebbe's life was spared through a series of miracles. As he referred back to that time that he sat in the cold dungeon waiting for his verdict, praying as he had never prayed before, he said that his only request was that if his life were somehow spared, "I should remember for the rest of my life that all the world is nothing but utter futility and that a Jew never has anything worthwhile, but the service of Hashem." He survived, and he remembered. He lived by a different set of rules.

Will You also stamp out the righteous with the wicked?...It would be sacrilege to You to do such a thing.It would be sacrilege to You! Shall the Judge of all earth not do justice? (18:23, 25)

One who examines the dialogue that ensues between Avraham Avinu and Hashem, concerning the proper punishment to be meted out against the citizens of Sodom, is left a bit taken aback. Our Patriarch, who symbolized emunah, faith in Hashem, who withstood ten seminal tests that established his preeminence on his conviction in and devotion to Hashem, comes

across to the casual spectator as questioning Hashem. One who believes does not question. He accepts the Divine decree unequivocally without bias and without malice.

This does not seem to be the case with Avraham.

First, our original premise is wrong. The idea that a believer does not question is false. Indeed, a number of individuals have, over the generations, turned from the Torah way as a result of this attitude. All too often, spiritual cripples who are ill-equipped to render sensible answers have responded with the usual: "We do not ask." We certainly do ask, but we understand that some answers are beyond our grasp. To ask is a profoundly human endeavor. Indeed, the gematriya, numerical equivalent of Adam, 45, equals that of mah, what. Man's entire development hinges on his ability to question. To quell one's questioning is to stunt one's growth. Many people have performed mitzvos and accepted customs simply as an act of complacency, because they did not ask, either for a lack of concern or out of a sense of embarrassment. There are also those who strayed so far away from Judaism that they do not know what to ask or how to formulate a question. They just moved away out of a lack of interest.

Returning to Avraham Avinu, we see that questioning is an integral part of his quest to deepen his belief in Hashem. He constantly questions and wants to understand more. Questioning is not the problem. It is how one presents his question that determines his moral posture. One who truly seeks an answer asks with respect and accepts the fact that some answers will elude him. Those whose questions are thrust as daggers to undermine, to impugn, to humiliate, however, are not worthy of receiving answers. They are only interested in their own rhetoric. For those, their question is their answer. They are not interested in anything else.

Eemunah is an ongoing process. Avraham began when he was three years old and continued on throughout his life asking until he arrived at the truth. One who wants to concretize his belief, to solidify his convictions, must question, but at the same time acknowledge that some answers are beyond his ken. With this in mind, we wonder why, when Hashem commanded Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, he did not question. Could there be any more inexplicable situation that demanded a cogent reason than such a command? It went against everything that Avraham had heretofore believed in. Yet, Avraham is lauded for his alacrity and equanimity in carrying out this command. What happened to his ability to question?

Perhaps, the difference lies in who is the focus of the question. Clearly, Avraham believed in Hashem with complete devotion. He understood and believed that whatever Hashem requested of him was the correct thing to do - even if he could not rationally reconcile it. He believed, and therefore, he acted. When the focus was centered totally on others, like the inhabitants of Sodom, or it was a question concerning receiving Eretz Yisrael for his descendants, Avraham felt it incumbent upon himself to make every effort to understand the situation, to rationalize the decree, to make sense out of a situation that seemed nonsensical. To put it simply: it is much easier to believe and accept subjectively when it involves oneself. When it involves others, we must try to understand so that we can explain. It is much more difficult to instruct others to believe without question than to do so for oneself.

Yitzchak Avinu's trust in his father was such that he viewed himself as part of his father. He was not a separate entity. He was Avraham. Avraham's emunah concerning himself was transferred to Yitzchak to the point that the Patriarch did not consider his son as "another" person. He was "Avraham." Furthermore, Yitzchak was fully aware of the sacrifice he was about to make, while the people of Sodom and Avraham's descendants who would one day inherit Eretz Yisrael were not in the loop. Thus, Avraham did not have the right to speak for them.

She departed and strayed in the desert of Be'er Sheva. (21:14)

Rashi interprets va'teisa, and she strayed, as alluding to Hagar's return to her father's idols, to her original pagan life. She figured that if she could not have a life of moral spiritual rectitude in the home of Avraham Avinu, she might as well revert to a life of paganism and moral degeneracy. Rashi does not cite any sources to support this claim. We wonder why he deviates from the regular p'shat, interpretation, that she strayed in the wilderness. Furthermore, from the fact that we note her speaking with the

Heavenly angel, it would seem indicative that she had not yet returned to a life of degeneracy and spiritual contamination. Otherwise, why would the angel speak with her?

In his sefer, Daas Chaim, Horav Chaim Walkin, Shlita, derives a powerful lesson from here. A Jew who has descended to such a nadir that he is on the level of va'teilech va'teisa, it is a certainty that he has lost his emunah, belief in the Almighty. Otherwise, it is impossible for a Jew who retains a sense of conviction, who still maintains his belief in Hashem, to turn to idols. Hagar merited seeing angels in Avraham's home. She spent time with an individual of such holiness that he is considered to be one of the legs of the Holy Chariot of the Almighty. Certainly, she was inspired and influenced by his unprecedented level of holiness. She may have been a pagan, but you cannot reside in such a spiritually elevated environment and not become inspired. Yet, the Torah attests to her "straying." If so, we must deduce that she returned to her father's idols. Had she had the slightest vestige of a memory of her past relationship with Avraham's home, she could not have descended to a matzav, situation, of va'teisa.

David Ha'Melech says in Tehillim, "Though I walk in the valley overshadowed by death, I fear no evil, for You are with me." During every situation, under all circumstances, regardless of where he is, he is never alone. Hashem is always with him. The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, commented that, "Whoever does not see G-d everywhere, does not see Him anywhere." What a powerful and profound thought! How many have strayed from the Torah using the excuse, "G-d has forsaken me," or "I cannot see G-d in my life." One who does not see G-d does not want to see Him. His eyes are closed. His heart is shut off. "Floundering, lost, wandering," these are terms not applicable to the believing Jew. He is always connected, like a kite flying through the wind. It may appear to be all over, but it is firmly rooted through a strong cord.

The parshah concerning Hagar's wandering in the wilderness is also read on Rosh Hashanah. If it is important to note during the year, it is especially significant at a time when the Jew sets out on his journey for the new year. Rosh Hashanah is the Yom HaZikaron, the day that we remember. We remember that we are not alone, that we can repent and return, because we have an address to which to return. We know where we belong and how to get there. We just have to turn around. As long as that cord of conviction has not been severed, we can go back. Indeed, we have never really left.

And it happened after these things that G-d tested Avraham. (22:1)

It makes sense to say that the test of the Akeidah revolved around Avraham Avinu. On the other hand, in the Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai of Rosh Hashanah, we say V'akeidas Yitzchak l'zaro hbyom b'rachamim tizkor. This implies that it was primarily a test of Yitzchak's devotion - not so much that of Avraham. Veritably, Avraham's test was greater because he had to perform the act of slaughtering his son proactively. Yitzchak's mesiras nefesh, act of self-sacrifice, was passive. He was to lay, prepared to offer up his life as the symbol of mesiras nefesh. His father had to act; he had to make sure not to upset this mitzvah. Nonetheless, it is called the Akeidas Yitzchak, and, apparently, we call upon Yitzchak's z'chus, merit, to protect us during our time of judgment. How are we to understand the depth of his nisayon, test?

The Chasam Sofer, zl, explains that Avraham heard the command directly from Hashem, similar to the Torah She'Biksav, Written Law. Yitzchak, however, gave up his life for something that he heard from his father, similar to the Torah She'Baal Peh, Oral Law. The Oral Law represents commitment to a tradition that is heard from our ancestors whose integrity and character we trust. The tradition of Torah She'Baal Peh has been transmitted throughout the generations from father to son and from rebbe to talmid. This is the very same tradition that Moshe Rabbeinu taught to Klal Yisrael during his forty years of leadership. The lesson of Akeidas Yitzchak is the lesson of commitment to the Oral Law. It is ironic that those who impugn commitment and the words of our sages venerate the Akeidas Yitzchak as the seminal event in the formation of our People. Yitzchak set the tone. He taught us the meaning of respect for the Oral Law. He was prepared to die for it. Should we not at least be willing to live by it?

And Avraham said, "Because I said, but there is no fear of G-d in this place. (20:11) "Now I know that you are a G-d fearing man." (22:12)

The concept of yiraas Elokim, fear of G-d, is mentioned twice in this parsha. First, Avraham Avinu remarks that he does not sense that yiraas Elokim is prevalent in Avimelech's country; thus, he feared for his life. Second, Hashem says that He now knows that Avraham is a G-d-fearing man. What is the meaning of the second statement? It is as if until now, Avraham had not proven his fear of G-d. A person who notices that the Philistines are lacking in fear of G-d should be in itself an indication of his own yiraah, fear. Otherwise, why emphasize a failing that exists in others? Horav Yonah Mertzbach, zl, explains that one who criticizes another individual's lack of fear does not necessarily establish his own credentials. In other words, it is easy to criticize others, but it proves nothing regarding one's own moral and spiritual posture. On the contrary, human nature dictates that we easily find fault in others. This certainly does not serve as a barometer of our own rectitude. When Avraham responded to Hashem's command with complete devotion and equanimity, he demonstrated his true affiliation with Hashem. He had spiritual integrity in that what he criticized in others, he first made sure was not a personal failing. Now, he could be called a yarei Elokim.

Va'ani Tefillah

I who have always had trust in Your loving-kindness, my heart may jubilate, because of Your salvation. I want to sing to Hashem when He brings His promises to fruition.

The Malbim, zl, interprets gilah, jubilation, as an expression which is used to describe a reaction to an unexpected occurrence. One who is saved under circumstances that had been unanticipated will have a "gilah" reaction - spontaneous, unheralded joy. David HaMelech says that although he trusted in Hashem's yeshuah, salvation, he "expected" it, nonetheless, when it arrived, his reaction was one of gilah, sudden, unpredicted joy. He never doubted for a moment that Hashem was there and that He would save him. Since he felt himself unworthy of this salvation, however, he realized that if it would occur, it would be because of Hashem's boundless chesed, loving kindness. This is why his joy is expressed through gilah. It was expected, but undeserved, which is a reason that it could have been denied. Now that he sees that he warranted salvation, he has an added sense of joy. Therefore, he sings his praises to Hashem Who rewarded him for his service.

The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, distinguishes between gilah and simchah in that gilah is an expression of joy for a past occurrence, while simchah is a reaction to a present circumstance. David Hamelech says that he reacts with gilah to chasdecha, Your loving kindness of the past, but to the present salvation he sings with renewed joy.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear father and grandfather Arthur I. Genshaft Yitzchok ben Yisroel z"l niftar 18 Cheshvan 5739 by his family Neil and Marie Genshaft Isaac and Naomi

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig (The TorahWeb Foundation)

"Vayeira Elav Hashem": Experiencing Hashem's Presence in Torah Life

Parashat Vayeira begins by recording Hashem's revelation to Avraham - "Vayeira elav Hashem". It is intriguing that the Torah provides no details about the purpose or content of this Revelation. Chazal link Hashem's visit with Avraham's recuperation from having undergone a brit milah (circumcision), but it is surely significant that the Torah omits these or other details. Numerous mefarshim also note that this encounter is formulated in an unusual manner. The Or haChayim points out that in previous contacts with Avraham (Bereshit 12:7;17:1), Hashem's name always precedes Avraham's. The Keli Yakar speculates why Avraham's name is omitted in favor of the more modest term "elav". The fact that the Torah abruptly transitions into Avraham's pursuit of the three visitors without recounting the outcome or even conclusion of this transcendent interaction heightens the mystery surrounding this encounter.

Chazal derived from Avraham's conduct that hachnassat orchim (welcoming guests) precedes kabbalat penei ha-Shechinah (experiencing Divine presence). This conclusion requires clarification. Is it conceivable that interpersonal duties, even halachically admirable ones, outweigh the

spiritual opportunity and religious obligations afforded by Hashem's presence?

The Or haChayim suggests that by emphasizing Avraham's role first in this brief and mysterious encounter, the Torah signals Hashem's unmediated contact. Undoubtedly, no agenda is defined because the experience was profoundly significant in its own right. Hashem's visit reflected and established Avraham's worthiness to be an ongoing recipient and embodiment of hashraat ha-Shechinah (she-ha-avot merkavah la-Shechinah). The Keli Yakar argues that the interaction focused on Avraham's humility and inward attainments and not on his public persona as the father of the nation. Hence, his role is defined by the term "elav" rather than by his name.

The significance of the agenda-less experience of "vayeira elav Hashem" may be better appreciated when we view it in the broader context of Avraham's life. While Avraham's initial achievement in rediscovering monotheism and the role of Hashem in the world is monumental, even unparalleled in human history, it is completely omitted in the Written Torah. Instead, the Torah consistently emphasizes Avraham's contributions in the world of concrete actions and interactions, and his impact upon others. Avraham's recorded career begins with his response to the call to action of "lech lecha" which entailed cutting ties to his past. This first of ten defining tests of Divine loyalty occurs after he has already demonstrated his religious activism as exemplified by Chazal's view that Avraham and Sarah had already influenced a group of ovdei Hashem. ("ve-hanefesh asher asu be-Charan"). Avraham's stature in avodat Hashem reaches a pinnacle in the final test, the akedah, which demand that he sacrifice his very future. This command, too, is introduced by the activist expression of "lech lecha". Precisely because of the activist character of Avraham's commitment to Hashem, it is crucially important for the Torah to record the pivotal experience of "vayeira elav Hashem". Bracketed by a life characterized by "lech lecha", it is precisely the experience of hashraat ha-Shechinah as an objective in its own right that culminates Avraham's brit milah covenant with Hashem. The insertion of "vayeira elav Hashem" devoid of explicated content or purpose or even context conveys that while avodat Hashem is expressed by a wide range of mitzvot and interactions, its ultimate objective is simply the experience of hashraat ha-Shechinah.

The Torah abruptly transitions to hachnassat orchim because the experience of hashraat ha-Shechinah further inspires Avraham to active service of Hashem and sensitizes him to hitherto unknown spiritual opportunities. Avraham's pause from active avodah due to the brit milah affords him the opportunity of gilui Shechinah for its own sake, the ultimate telos of his efforts. His expanded awareness is described by the phrase "vayisa einav va-yar", which typically indicates personal insight following a revelation (as in the aftermath of Hashem's communication regarding the akedah - Bereshit 22:13). It is evident that the decision to abruptly pursue the course of hachnassat orchim was not an abandonment of hashraat ha-Shechinah but its reinforcement. When Torah life is properly lived, the committed Jew experiences Hashem's presence in the punctilious observance of the halachah itself.

The relationship between seeking gilui haShechinah and active avodat Hashem has its roots in Creation itself. The Torah initially reports (Bereshit 2:8- "vayasem sham et ha-adam asher yazar") that man was simply placed in Gan Eden with no apparent charge or role. Several pesukim later (2:15), we are informed of man's important function "leavdah u-leshamrah"- to work and to preserve. The Netziv explains that initially it was intended that man simply experience the Divine presence. It is possible that the Torah means to convey that while man is designed to act in the world, the ultimate goal of this activity is to develop a bond with his Creator, to bask in His presence.

Jewish life, patterned after the career and personality of Avraham, its founding father, demands constant halachic activity in a wide range of spheres. The method in which the comprehensive halachic corpus was communicated is, of course, of vital importance. Halachic activism was revealed in a singular act of Divine Revelation experienced by the entire Jewish nation. The Ramban (Devarim and Sefer ha-Mitzvot) insists that remembering and acknowledging the event of Revelation constitutes an independent mitzvah. In the haggadah, we read that had Klal Yisrael

merited only the act of Revelation at Sinai even absent the content of Torah that was transmitted it would have been an monumental attainment. The gemara in Berachot asserts that in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, Hashem's presence is best experienced by immersion in halachic observance.

During the period of Elul until after Shemini Azeret when we recite Tehillim chapter 27, ("Le-David Hashem ori ve-yishii...") we express our deepest spiritual-existential yearning by focusing on a single, simple, yet profound request ("achat shaalti mei-eit Hashem oto avakesh"). In the very period in which we intensify our halachic activity and recommit to a more scrupulous future observance of the mitzvot, we beseech Hashem simply that we may merit to bask in His presence ("lachazot be-noam Hashem ulevaker be-heichalo"). As the Malbim notes this seminal petition stands independent of any further goal. These powerful sentiments, articulated repeatedly at this pivotal time of the year, apply at all times. They are inextricably linked to a life of avodat Hashem as defined by halachic commitment. The request stems from Avraham Avinu's paradigmatic "vayera elav Hashem" experience that continues to inspire his descendants.

h a a r e t z

Portion of the week / In praise of social activism

By Benjamin Lau

When Abraham, sitting at the entrance to his tent at midday, sees three strangers, he runs toward them and implores them to be his guests: "My Lord [or lords], if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant" (Genesis 18:3). We can read the word adonai as "my lords" (see Rashi's first interpretation of the term) or as "my Lord" (that is, God). According to the latter approach, it appears that Abraham is apologizing for something. While Rashi explains that Abraham is asking God to wait until he has run toward the guests and brought them into his tent, Nahmanides elaborates, suggesting the following course of events: Abraham is sitting by himself outside his tent and is alone with God in an intimate moment of communion that cuts him off from his surroundings (comparable to the meditative state in Eastern religions). The purpose of this moment is to be one with God and to separate one's soul from one's body. However, while doing so, Abraham sees the three travelers. His decision to close what is then his open channel of communication with God, and run toward the strangers is typical of Abraham, who symbolizes the motto, "Hospitality is more important than welcoming the Shekhina (divine presence)." He teaches us that concern for others is the supreme commandment.

The strangers, ostensibly angels, depart and are on their way to destroy Sodom and its environs. God decides to inform Abraham of his plans, and the Torah explains why: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). What is uppermost in God's agenda? Justice and charity. Thus, true religious faith is expressed by social action and concern for others - two elements whose importance exceeds the ideal of isolation and mystical seclusion. We must see to the welfare of the needy and not just focus on our relationship with God.

There are those who feel that this is a distortion of religious priorities; they do not consider social action a manifestation of religious belief. However, a survey of classical Jewish sources, from various periods (ranging from the Prophets to the Talmud and Maimonides), reinforces the argument that social commitment must be a priority on the religious individual's agenda. Jeremiah the Prophet lives in the period before the Temple's destruction, harshly criticizing the corrupt regime he sees and demanding that the nation return to God through social justice: "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (9:23-24). When he verbally attacks Israel's most corrupt king - Eliakim, son of Josiah - Jeremiah sets before him a mirror that shows the difference between Eliakim and his

father: "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 22:15-16). Knowledge of God enables a regime to be free of corruption: A government that displays a fear of God conducts its affairs with justice and charity; thus, corruption means an absence of faith in God.

A long list

The Talmud (Tractate Makot, p. 23b) tells us that a Jewish home must be built on 613 foundations (the same number as the commandments that are binding on all Jews). However, other rabbinical scholars proposed drastically narrowing this number of basic principles. For instance, in Psalm 15, there are only 11: "A Psalm to David: Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoreth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved."

However, even this list is too long. In another passage, the Talmud proposes only three main principles, basing itself on the verse in Micah (6:8): "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Habakkuk suggests that only one guiding principle is sufficient for the religious individual: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (2:4). According to Habakkuk, this is Judaism's authentic foundation.

Violence and the suppression of the weak are not part of God's world. The basic principle of religious behavior is that the "just shall live by his faith." Integrity in interpersonal relations is what gives us vitality and must be high up on the agenda of all those who seek God. The foundations of Judaism are the principles of social justice and honest relationships with other human beings. In presenting the laws concerning charitable gifts (Chapter 10, law No. 1), Maimonides states: "We must be careful to observe the commandment of performing acts of charity more than any other commandment prescribing positive action (mitzvot asseh), because charity is the true sign of the religious individual, who is the descendant of our patriarch Abraham, as it is written: 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.'

Israel's throne can only be established - and true religious faith must also rest - upon charity, as we read, 'In righteousness shalt thou be established' [Isaiah 54:14]. And Israel will be redeemed only through charity, as it is written, 'Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness' [Isa. 1:27]."

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion Balancing Prayer and Torah

Our time is limited. How much time should we devote to prayer, and how much to Torah study? Which activity is more important?

We find the Talmudic scholars Rava and Rav Hamenuna disagreed about this very issue:

"Rava saw Rav Hamenuna praying at length. He commented to his colleague: They neglect Chayei Olam (eternal life, i.e., Torah study) and occupy themselves with Chayei Sha'ah (temporal life - prayer)! But Rav Hamenuna did not agree. He held that there is a time for prayer and a time for Torah study." [Shabbat 10a]

Why did Rava say that prayer is just Chayei Sha'ah, of temporal value? And what exactly was Rav Hamenuna's defense for spending so much time in prayer, at the expense of his Torah studies?

Mind and Heart

Rashi explains that prayer is Chayei Sha'ah since we pray for worldly concerns - for health, peace, and livelihood. Yet this explanation is not fully satisfying, since we also pray for spiritual goals, such as knowledge, forgiveness, and redemption.

According to Rav Kook, the terms Chayei Olam and Chayei Sha'ah refer to the essential difference between these two forms of divine service. Torah study constantly provides us with new knowledge from the source of truth. Since it is based on our intellectual efforts to uncover eternal, unchanging truths, Torah is Chayei Olam.

While Torah enriches the mind, prayer targets the heart. Prayer does not supply us with new knowledge, but rather utilizes our emotional faculties to deepen the impact of ethical teachings and Torah knowledge on the soul. Prayer does not search for new truths, but rather aspires to absorb and internalize truths already acquired. Since prayer relates to the more volatile aspect of human nature - emotions and feelings that fluctuate with time - the Sages referred to prayer as Chayei Sha'ah, belonging to temporal life.

Furthermore, it is precisely those images that are not intellectually rigorous that have the power to engage and excite the emotions. Since our emotional faculties are closer to our physical side, they have difficulty relating to the abstract concepts of the intellect and require the assistance of more concrete images. Therefore, in prayer we are permitted to utilize descriptions of God, out of recognition for their powerful impact on the emotions.

In summary, the terms Chayei Olam and Chayei Sha'ah refer to the nature of the human faculty engaged as well as the relative quality of the knowledge. Torah study is based on eternal truths and uses our steady powers of reason and logic, while the goal of prayer is to reach out to the lower and less stable parts of the human psyche. For this reason, Rava criticized Rav Hamenuna's lengthy prayers, since they stole time from the eternal value of Torah study. "They neglect eternal life and occupy themselves with temporal life!"

A Time for Prayer

Rav Hamenuna did not contest Rava's evaluation of the relative merits of Torah study and prayer. His reply was based on an understanding that each of these two forms of divine service has its own place.

The Sages taught an important axiom regarding Torah study: "One should always study that which his heart desires" [Avodah Zarah 19a]. The rabbis recognized that our inner inclination will lead us in the proper path. If one is drawn to a particular area of Torah, this is a sign that the state of one's soul currently requires spiritual sustenance from this area of study.

This principle also holds true when seeking the correct balance between Torah and prayer. The intellect is not fully capable of judging how much we should nourish ourselves from the profound depths of Torah knowledge, and how much we need to add the 'spices' of emotion and excitement. Here too, our inner inclination will guide us appropriately.

When one is drawn to Torah study, then this is 'the time for Torah' - the staple for spiritual advance for the individual and society as a whole. But if an individual feels from within a longing for the expanse of prayer, a yearning to pour out his soul before God, then this is a sign that his soul currently requires this form of spiritual service, even though others may be more elevated.

The Sages established set times for prayer. These times meet the needs of most people, but there is room to adapt to the needs of the individual. This understanding of how we should balance prayer and Torah study is the crux of Rav Hamenuna's teaching, "There is a time for prayer and there is a time for Torah."

[adapted from Ein Ayah vol. III p. 3; Olat Re'iyah vol. I preface p. 20]

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

WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5768

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt, Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights
A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav

TALLIS KATAN: QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

QUESTION: Do men have an halachic obligation to wear a tallis katan?

DISCUSSION: According to the Midrash quoted by Rashi, the Jewish People were rewarded with the mitzvah of tzitzis, which are attached to a garment, because our forebear, Shem, took pains to preserve the modesty of his drunken father Noah by covering him with a garment. The Talmud(1) states that one who is scrupulous in his observance of the mitzvah of tzitzis will merit "to see the Shechinah."

But is one halachically required to wear a garment with tzitzis fringes attached to it, or is it merely optional?

Although Biblical law does not require one to put tzitzis on a garment unless the garment that he is wearing has four square corners, which most garments nowadays do not have, it is fitting and proper for every male to wear a tallis katan (a small four-cornered garment) all day and thereby incur the obligation to wear tzitzis. In so doing, he fulfills an important mitzvah, one that serves as a constant reminder of all of the other mitzvos of the Torah.(2) Accordingly, it has become customary for all G-d-fearing men to wear a tallis katan all day.(3) Since this has become the prevalent custom, one may not deviate from it, and nowadays, one is obligated to wear a tallis katan all day long.(4) Indeed, those who are meticulous in their mitzvah observance do not walk four cubits (approximately eight feet) without tzitzis.(5)

QUESTION: Which blessing, if any, does one recite over a tallis katan?

DISCUSSION: Married men and those who wear a large tallis during davening need not recite a separate blessing over their tallis katan. Rather, when they recite the proper blessing over the tallis gadol, they should have the tallis katan in mind.(6) Unmarried men who do not wear a tallis gadol recite the blessing of Al mitzvas tzitzis on a tallis katan.(7) If the tallis katan is of questionable size or material, a blessing should not be said.(8)

Although all married(9) men should wear a tallis gadol during davening, they should not forgo davening with a minyan if a tallis gadol is unavailable.(10) [In regard to tefillin, however, it is preferable to daven without a minyan than to daven without tefillin.(11)]

Before the blessing on a tallis gadol or katan may be recited, the tzitzis fringes should be separated from one another.(12) Some poskim(13) imply that if the fringes are intertwined, then one has not fulfilled the mitzvah of tzitzis at all, while other poskim hold that b'diavad one has fulfilled the mitzvah.(14) [If taking time to separate the tzitzis will cause one to miss tefillah b'tzibur, he may rely on the lenient view.(15)] All poskim agree that if the fringes are tied [or glued] together, then the mitzvah has not been fulfilled and the blessing said over them is said in vain.(16)

Often, the chulyos (the top segment of the fringes which is wound and knotted) become unraveled or loosened. If this happens, the fringes should be rewound and knotted. On Shabbos and Yom Tov, however, this is strictly forbidden. Tightening or knotting tzitzis fringes on Shabbos may even be Biblically prohibited.(17)

QUESTION: May one wear a tallis katan made out of cotton?

DISCUSSION: There is a dispute among the Rishonim as to whether it is a Biblical requirement to attach tzitzis to a four-cornered garment made of cotton, or only to a garment made out of wool or linen. While some Rishonim hold that only woolen and linen garments are Biblically obligated in tzitzis, others include cotton as well. Both views are quoted in the Shulchan Aruch,(18) and the Rama rules according to the view that maintains that cotton garments do incur the Biblical obligation of tzitzis. Nevertheless, many poskim advise a G-d-fearing person to wear only a tallis katan made from wool and thereby fulfill the mitzvah according to all views.(19) Other poskim, however, do not insist on a wool garment, and there were eminent Torah scholars(20) who wore a tallis katan made out of cotton.

QUESTION: May a woman "make tzitzis" - i.e., attach tzitzis strings to a garment (tallis katan or tallis gadol)?

DISCUSSION: The Talmud(21) excludes women from the writing of tefillin since they are not commanded to wear tefillin. Following this line of reasoning, Rabbeinu Tam ruled that since women are not commanded to wear tzitzis, they are also not permitted to attach the tzitzis to the garment. (22) The majority of Rishonim, however, do not agree with this ruling. They allow women to be involved in all phases of tzitzis production. The Shulchan Aruch(23) rules with the majority. Nevertheless, in deference to

the minority opinion (and for other reasons as well), the Rama advises that l'chatchilah, women should not be allowed to put tzitzis on a garment. (24) Although one should follow the Rama's directive,(25) all poskim agree that after the fact, if these procedures were done by women, the tzitzis are kosher and need not be restrung.(26)

QUESTION: May a minor attach tzitzis fringes to a garment?

DISCUSSION: Based on the previously mentioned Rama, some poskim rule that a minor below the age of bar mitzvah should not attach tzitzis to a garment. Other poskim feel that minors are not excluded and may attach tzitzis to a garment. The Mishnah Berurah rules that l'chatchilah, it is not proper to allow a minor to do so.(27)

A minor, however, may prepare tzitzis for himself or for another minor. Even when he becomes bar mitzvah, he does not have to unknot the tzitzis and restrung them.(28)

There is, however, another issue concerning minors attaching tzitzis to a garment. When tzitzis are placed on a garment, they must be attached with the intention of "l'shem mitzvas tzitzis," for the sake of the mitzvah of tzitzis. Since a minor may not be mature enough to concentrate properly, he may not attach tzitzis to a garment unless he is under the supervision of an adult. If a minor was not properly supervised, then the tzitzis must be removed and reattached properly.(29)

QUESTION: Is it permitted to attach tzitzis fringes to a garment at night?

DISCUSSION: There are some poskim who recommend that one should not do so. (30) Their reasoning is based on the halachic principle of ta'aseh (you should make) v'lo min ha-asui (it should not be automatically done): Since one is not obligated to wear tzitzis at night,(31) it follows that one cannot produce kosher tzitzis at night, either. The vast majority of poskim,(32) however, reject this argument. The Mishnah Berurah does not discuss this issue, but the Chafetz Chayim is quoted(33) as permitting tzitzis to be attached at night. The Chazon Ish is reported(34) as having asked that tzitzis be prepared for him at night.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Menachos 43b, quoted in O.C. 24:6.

2 MBamidbar 15:39 (quoted in O.C. 24:1): "That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." In addition, the Talmud (Menachos 41a) says that wearing a tallis katan protects a person from Hashem's wrath.

3 Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:2; Rav Y.E. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael, pg. 114); Tzitz Eliezer 8:4; Yechaveh Da'as 4:2.

4 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:4. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:20-25.

5 Mishnah Berurah 8:1. See Halichos Shlomo 1:3 (Devar Halachah 25) and Tzitz Eliezer 14:49, who say that the tallis katan should be left on even if one is suffering from the heat. See The Daily Halachah Discussion, pgs. 58-60, for other opinions.

6 Mishnah Berurah 8:24, 30; Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:16. Some poskim rule that if there will be a "long break" until the tallis gadol is put on, a blessing should be said on the tallis katan; see The Daily Halachah

Discussion, pgs. 307-311, for an elaboration

7 Rama, O.C. 8:6.

8 Mishnah Berurah 8:17. See The Daily Halachah Discussion, pgs. 306-307, for the proper dimensions for the tallis.

9 The Sepharadic and German custom is that unmarried men wear a tallis gadol, too.

10 Mor u'Ketizah 25; Imrei Yosher 2:201-2; Be'er Moshe 5:5. See Halichos Shlomo 1:3-3.

11 Mishnah Berurah 66:40. See, however, Minchas Yitzchak 2:107.

12 O.C. 8:7. On Shabbos and Yom Tov, however, the tzitzis should not be separated from one another; Halichos Shlomo 1:3-5.

13 Artzos ha-Chayim, O.C. 8; Beur Halachah 8:7, s.v. tzarich, according to the view of the Goan of Vilna and Olas Tamid.

14 Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:13; Chazon Ish, O.C. 3:9.

15 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 9:7; Mishnah Berurah 8:18; Aruch ha-Shulchan, 8:13. The Artzos ha-Chayim (quoted above) holds that one must separate his tzitzis even at the expense of tefillah b'tzibur.

16 Chazon Ish, O.C. 3:9.

17 Ketzos ha-Shulchan (Badei ha-Shulchan 123:4); Az Nidberu 3:22; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasa 15:50.

18 O.C. 9:1.

19 Chayei Adam 11:5; Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 9:4; Mishnah Berurah 9:5; Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:2; 2:1; 3:1; 3:52. In Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:20-25, Rav Feinstein adds that one who suffers from the heat is not required to wear woolen garments, although he himself was particular to do so.

20 Chazon Ish (quoted in Shoneh Halachos 9:1) and Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu 3:188) based on the ruling of the Gra (Ma'asei Rav 17). There are several reasons given why the Gra ruled so; See Tzitzis - Halachah Pesukah, pg. 77. 21 Gittin 45b.

22 Many poskim rule that other mitzvos (such as putting sechach on a succah) are included in this prohibition as well. See, however, Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:40-3.

23 O.C. 14:1.

24 The Rama's restriction, however, applies specifically to inserting the strings through the hole and knotting the first set of chulyos and the double knot immediately following; all the rest may be done by women l'chatchilah; Mishnah Berurah 14:1.

25 See Be'ur Halachah 14:1. Aruch ha-Shulchan 14:7 refers to this stringency as a chumra b'alma.

26 Mishnah Berurah 14:5.

27 In 14:4 he quotes both views without a decision. In Be'ur Halachah he rules that it is appropriate to be stringent.

28 Be'ur Halachah 14:1, since we view that situation as a b'diavad, and b'diavad the tzitzis are valid according to all views. See Chanoch l'Na'ar 9, note 16, who questions this leniency.

29 Mishnah Berurah 14:4.

30 Peri Megadim 18:1; Tosefos Chayim on Chayei Adam 11:1.

31 The Talmud (Menachos 43a) derives from the verse "and you should see them" that there is no mitzvah of tzitzis at night.

32 Tehillah l'David 18:4; Aruch ha-Shulchan 14:7; Kaf ha-Chayim 18:2; Minchas Yitzchak 9:8; Halichos Shlomo 1:3-23.

33 Rivevos Efrayim, O.C. 3:27; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:13.

34 Dinim v'Hanhagos (Chazon Ish) 2:11; Orchos Rabbeinu 3:188. Weekly-Halacha, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. The author, Rabbi Neustadt, is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos. The Weekly-Halacha Series is distributed L'zchus Doniel Meir ben Hinda. The series is distributed by the Harbotzas Torah Division of Congregation Shomre Shabbos, 1801 South Taylor Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118 HaRav Yisroel Grumer, Marah D'Asra.

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The Truth About Shmita, Avi Shafran

Those haredim in Israel are at it again, inventing new stringencies, coercing other Jews, trying to make a dishonest buck and generally making life unlivable for everybody else.

At least that is what seems to emerge from recent reportage about the agricultural sabbatical year - or shmita, ushered in on Rosh Hashana.

The New York Times contended that an Israeli Chief Rabbi, because he respected a revered elder rabbinical leader's judgment, is "considered" - by whom was not clarified - "a puppet" of the senior rabbi.

A New York Sun columnist insinuated that a religious legal decision was born of a desire to make money on the backs of the poor. "There are, after all, no farmers in the ultra-Orthodox community," wrote Hillel Halkin, wrongly, "and plenty of rabbis and kashrut supervisors who will find jobs making sure that Jewish-grown fruits and vegetables are not, God forbid, being smuggled into the diet of unsuspecting Israelis." And a New York Jewish Week editorial both got its facts wrong (contending that the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, by setting a kashrut certification standard, had "disallowed" food of lower standards) and saw fit to invoke an unsubstantiated accusation of moral turpitude against one rabbi and the arrest of another's family member as indictments of the rabbis' religious legal opinions.

SOME ISRAELI publications were shriller still. The Jerusalem Report characterized the granting of permission to local rabbis to set their communities, kashrut standards thus: "Confrontation looms as the increasingly powerful ultra-Orthodox camp flexes its muscles and attempts to impose strict observance of the shmita commandment on all Israelis."

Irresponsible media coverage of haredim is nothing new. But were such misinformation and provocation used against Jews rather than against some Jews, it would be roundly condemned as something worse than journalism-as-usual.

THE FACTS: The Torah enjoins Jews privileged to live in the Holy Land to not till or plant in Jewish-owned soil during each seventh year, known as shmita. What grows of its own is to be treated as ownerless and may not be sold. Shmita-observance bespeaks our recognition that the land is the

Lord's, and its merit allows Jews to, in the words of Leviticus [25:19], "abide in the land, in safety." For Jews who believe that Israel perseveres only through miracles, shmita is no minor mitzva.

When substantial numbers of Jews began to return to the Holy Land in the 19th century, some farmers among them endeavored to observe shmita; most, though, living in deep poverty, did not. As a result, in 1896, religious leaders - including haredi rabbis - approved a fall-back plan whereby land owned by Jews was technically transferred to the possession of an Arab for the duration of the shmita year. That way, Jewish farmers would be acting as sharecroppers rather than as tillers of their own shmita-qualifying soil.

During subsequent shmita years, many farmers continued to rely on that sale loophole or heter mechira. And when the state of Israel was created, the official state Rabbinate endorsed it as well.

A few farmers, though, opted to observe shmita in its original way, allowing their fields to lie fallow and relying on other income or charity (ultimately, on God), to make it through the months when they could not farm and sell produce. As a result, in the 1950s and 1960s, about 250 acres of land "rested" as per the Biblical injunction.

Later shmita years saw increasing numbers of farmers follow suit. Seven years ago, the number of acres left untilled had risen more than 200-fold from the 60s, to 55,000. This year, 3,000-3,500 farmers will be observing shmita, and 100,000 acres are expected to be left fallow in accordance with the Torah's direction. Every major Orthodox kashrut-certification agency in North America approves only Israeli produce hewing to the highest shmita standard.

The reasons for the growth of shmita-observance are several, among them a general trend toward greater observance, recognition of the ad-hoc nature of the heter mechira, and the experience of farmers who not only did not suffer for their shmita observance but experienced unusual blessings.

SO WHAT'S with all the negative press? Good question. This year, Israel's Chief Rabbinate declared that while it still did not oppose reliance on the heter mechira, it was, for the first time, permitting municipal rabbis in Israel's towns and cities, when issuing kashrut certifications, to decide for their localities whether to rely on that fall-back standard or opt for the original one.

From the reaction, one might think that the chief rabbis had declared an extra year of shmita rather than simply taken a pluralistic stance on religious standards. Israel's agriculture minister, Shalom Simhon, thundered a threat to forbid imports from Arab-owned land (which meet the higher shmita standard). Media like the Jewish Week misleadingly described the new policy as some sort of prohibition.

Even in cities where the municipal rabbi has not granted kosher certification for heter mechira produce, nothing prevents a vendor from selling such produce (sans a Rabbinate kashrut-sticker) - which will surely be less expensive than the rabbinically-sanctioned fruits and vegetables.

But, as The New York Times article admitted, about Jerusalem haredim: "The community is already among the poorest in Jerusalem, but the rulings of their rabbis matter far more to them than money." And speaking of money, Jews outside Israel are putting theirs where their beliefs are.

A 35-year-old organization, Keren Hashvi'is, raises millions of dollars each shmita year to help support shmita-observant farmers. Most donations are relatively small, from people of limited means - testifying to the broad and deep connection tens of thousands of Jews worldwide feel to their Israeli brethren farming holy soil. (In the United States, Keren Hashvi'is operates from Agudath Israel of America's Manhattan offices.) But jaundiced eyes see only haredi Jews poisoning Jewish wells. It is a truly strange panorama: Observers usually enamored of ecological and liberal ideals have somehow been transformed into fierce opponents of leaving nature alone, of providing Arabs with extra income and of permitting individual rabbis to rule in accordance with their consciences.

And in the background, religiously dedicated farmers are doing what they believe will merit security and peace for the Holy Land, with help from Jews across Israel and around the world.

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