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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYIGASH - 5773

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From: "Shabbat Shalom" <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> Date: Dec 20, 2012 6:50 PM Subject: Parshat Vayigash - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

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Choice and Change
Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The sequence from Bereishit 37 to 50 is the longest unbroken narrative in the Torah, and there can be no doubt who its hero is: Joseph. The story begins and ends with him. We see him as a child, beloved – even spoiled – by his father; as an adolescent dreamer, resented by his brothers; as a slave, then a prisoner, in Egypt; then as the second most powerful figure in the greatest empire of the ancient world. At every stage, the narrative revolves around him and his impact on others. He dominates the last third of Bereishit, casting his shadow on everything else. From almost the beginning, he seems destined for greatness.

Yet history did not turn out that way. To the contrary, it is another brother who, in the fullness of time, leaves his mark on the Jewish people. Indeed, we bear his name. The covenantal family has been known by several names. One is Ivri, "Hebrew" (possibly related to the ancient apiru), meaning "outsider, stranger, nomad, one who wanders from place to place." That is how Abraham and his children were known to others. The second is Yisrael, derived from Jacob's new name after he "wrestled with G-d and with man and prevailed." After the division of the kingdom and the conquest of the North by the Assyrians, however, they became known as Yehudim or Jews, for it was the tribe of Judah who dominated the kingdom of the South, and they who survived the Babylonian exile. So it was not Joseph but Judah who conferred his identity on the people, Judah who became the ancestor of Israel's greatest king, David, Judah from whom the messiah will be born. Why Judah, not Joseph? The answer undoubtedly lies in the beginning of Vayigash, as

the two brothers confront one another, and Judah pleads for Benjamin's release.

The clue lies many chapters back, at the beginning of the Joseph story. It is there we find that it was Judah who proposed selling Joseph into slavery: Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood? Let's sell him to the Arabs and not harm him with our own hands. After all – he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. (37: 26-27)

This is a speech of monstrous callousness. There is no word about the evil of murder, merely pragmatic calculation ("What will we gain"). At the very moment he calls Joseph "our own flesh and blood" he is proposing selling him as a slave. Judah has none of the tragic nobility of Reuben who, alone of the brothers, sees that what they are doing is wrong, and makes an attempt to save him (it fails). At this point, Judah is the last person from whom we expect great things.

However, Judah – more than anyone else in the Torah – changes. The man we see all these years later is not what he was then. Then he was prepared to see his brother sold into slavery. Now he is prepared to suffer that fate himself rather than see Benjamin held as a slave. As he says to Joseph: "Now, my lord, let me remain in place of the boy as your lordship's slave, and let him go with his brothers. How can I return to my father without the boy? I could not bear to see the misery which my father would suffer." (44: 33-34)

It is a precise reversal of character. Callousness has been replaced with concern. Indifference to his brother's fate has been transformed into courage on his behalf. He is willing to suffer what he once inflicted on Joseph so that the same fate should not befall Benjamin. At this point Joseph reveals his identity. We know why. Judah has passed the test that Joseph has carefully constructed for him. Joseph wants to know if Judah has changed. He has.

This is a highly significant moment in the history of the human spirit. Judah is the first penitent – the first baal teshuvah – in the Torah. Where did it come from, this change in his character? For that, we have to backtrack to chapter 38 – the story of Tamar. Tamar, we recall, had married Judah's two elder sons, both of whom had died, leaving her a childless widow. Judah, fearing that his third son would share their fate, withheld him from her – thus leaving her unable to remarry and have children. Once she understands her situation, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute. Judah sleeps with her. She becomes pregnant. Judah, unaware of the disguise, concludes that she must have had a forbidden relationship and orders her to be put to death. At this point, Tamar – who, while disguised, had taken Judah's seal, cord and staff as a pledge – send them to Judah with a message: "The father of my child is the man to whom these belong." Judah now understands the whole story. Not only has he placed Tamar in an impossible situation of living widowhood, and not only is he the father of her child, but he also realises that she has behaved with extraordinary discretion in revealing the truth without shaming him (it is from this act of Tamar's that we derive the rule that "one should rather throw oneself into a fiery furnace than shame someone else in public"). Tamar is the heroine of the story, but it has one significant consequence. Judah admits he was wrong. "She was more righteous than I," he says. This is the first time in the Torah someone acknowledges their own guilt. It is also the turning point in Judah's life. Here is born that ability to recognise one's own wrongdoing, to feel remorse, and to change – the complex phenomenon known as teshuvah – that later leads to the great scene in Vayigash, where Judah is capable of turning his earlier behaviour on its head and doing the opposite of what he had once done before. Judah is ish teshuvah, penitential man.

We now understand the significance of his name. The verb lehodot means two things. It means "to thank," which is what Leah has in mind when she gives Judah, her fourth son, his name: "this time I will thank the Lord." However, it also means, "to admit, acknowledge." The biblical term vidui, "confession," – then and now part of the process of teshuvah,

and according to Maimonides its key element – comes from the same root. Judah means "he who acknowledged his sin."

We now also understand one of the fundamental axioms of teshuvah: "Rabbi Abbahu said: In the place where penitents stand, even the perfectly righteous cannot stand" (Berachot 34b). His prooftext is the verse from Isaiah (57: 19), "Peace, peace to him that was far and to him that is near." The verse puts one who "was far" ahead of one who "is near." As the Talmud makes clear, however, Rabbi Abbahu's reading is by no means uncontroversial. Rabbi Jochanan interprets "far" as "far from sin" rather than "far from G-d." The real proof is Judah. Judah is a penitent, the first in the Torah. Joseph is consistently known to tradition as ha-tzaddik, "the righteous." Joseph became mishneh le-melech, "second to the king." Judah, however, became the father of Israel's kings. Where the penitent Judah stands, even the perfectly righteous Joseph cannot stand. However great an individual may be in virtue of his or her natural character, greater still is one who is capable of growth and change. That is the power of penitence, and it began with Judah.

To read more writings and teachings from the Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, please visit www.chiefrabbi.org.

<http://rabbibuchwald.njop.org/>

December 17th, 2012

Vayigash 5773-2012

"Is My Father Still Alive?"

by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Vayigash, we read of one of the most dramatic moments in the Torah, when Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers.

In Genesis 45, the Torah relates, that after pushing his brothers to the brink, Joseph could no longer restrain himself, and asked that everyone except for his brothers, be removed from the room. Joseph cried out in a loud voice so that all of Egypt and Pharaoh's household heard, and said to his brothers (Genesis 45:3), "Ah'nee Yosef, Ha'ohd ah'vee chai?" "I am Joseph, is my father still alive?"

What is Joseph asking? After all, Joseph's brothers had already told him that their father Jacob would die if Benjamin is not released and allowed to return home, so obviously Joseph knows that his father is still alive. (See Vayigash 5763-2002, where a possible explanation for Joseph's question was suggested.)

A unique interpretation of this particular scene by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was recently brought to my attention. Before sharing his interpretation, I would like to tell you about Rabbi Soloveitchik, whom I had the privilege of studying with at Yeshiva University in the early 1970s. I think it is important to know who Rabbi Soloveitchik was, in order to better appreciate this particular interpretation.

I take the liberty of paraphrasing some of the things that I wrote about Rabbi Soloveitchik in a holiday message for Simchat Torah 5764-2003, entitled "Celebrating Torah."

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), the late Rosh HaYeshiva (head teacher) of Yeshiva University's Rabbinic School, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), was perhaps, more than any other person in our generation, the one person who most lyrically and poetically described the beauty of Torah study. In the forty years that he served as Rosh HaYeshiva, he taught thousands of students and inspired many tens of thousands with his lectures. The recordings of his lectures and classes, and the many writings about his teachings, continue to inspire multiple generations of admirers and followers. This coming Passover will mark the twentieth anniversary of Rabbi Soloveitchik's passing.

In his writings and lectures, Rabbi Soloveitchik frequently recalls how the love for Torah study that was powerfully transmitted in his home, and how alive Torah was for the young Yoseph Ber. Rabbi Soloveitchik

remembers that, as a young child of seven or eight, he would lie in bed at night and listen to his father (Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, 1874-1941), who was studying with his students in the adjoining room, debate over a portion in the Talmud or a section of the Code of Maimonides. He describes how exciting it was—like a real battle. But in the end, Maimonides would always prevail. Some children play with toy soldiers, Rabbi Soloveitchik played with living images of the ancient rabbis and fantasized about them.

One night, after struggling with a particularly difficult passage, he heard his father, for the first time, express defeat, and announce that the portion of the Code of Maimonides that they had been studying simply did not make sense. Maimonides had been vanquished. He had been defeated!

Terribly upset, the young child, Yoseph Ber, jumped out of bed, ran to his mother, and began crying, "Mommy, mommy, Maimonides has been defeated!" His mother comforted him and said: "Don't worry. Your father and the students will continue to study. They'll continue to argue in order to try to understand the portion, and eventually Maimonides will prevail. And if not, when you grow up, you will study hard in order to elucidate this problem, and you will show how Maimonides is truly correct!"

The passion of his childhood feelings for Torah remained with Rabbi Soloveitchik for his entire life. It is the passion that he so powerfully and effectively communicated to his students in his classes and lectures.

In a lecture entitled, "The Future of Jewish Education in America," which Rabbi Soloveitchik delivered at Lincoln Square Synagogue on May 28, 1975, Rabbi Soloveitchik goes into more detail about his early education. He relates that his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, was a rabbi of a small town, Khislavichi, that was located on the border of White Russia and Russia proper.

When he was seven or eight years old, Rabbi Soloveitchik attended a Cheder school, like many other Jewish boys. The Melamed (teacher) was a Chabad Chassid (a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe). Although the Melamed was not a great scholar, Rabbi Soloveitchik expressed profound gratitude to him throughout his life, because, aside from his own mother, the Melamed was the only one to teach the young child how to, not only practice the rituals of Judaism, but how to live Judaism.

It was a murky winter day in January, cloudy and overcast, during the Chanukah festival. The Torah portion of the week was Vayigash. Although the Chanukah holiday interrupted the dreariness of the winter, the boys knew that a long, desolate, cold winter lay ahead, in which they would have to get up while it was still dark, and return home with a lantern, because nightfall was so early.

Rabbi Soloveitchik described the mood of the boys as depressed that particular Chanukah day, listless, lazy and sad. Everything in the Cheder was recited mechanically, in a dull monotone, droning the words in both Hebrew and in Yiddish.

The tired and bored students read about Judah approaching Joseph. Droning in Yiddish and in Hebrew a child read the verses (Genesis 44:19-20), "My lord has asked his servants: 'Have you a father or a brother?' And we said to the lord, 'We have an old father and a young child of his old age.'"

Suddenly the Rebbe, who himself was half asleep, rose and jumped to his feet with a strange gleam in his eyes, and motioned to the reader to stop. Rabbi Soloveitchik relates that the Rebbe then turned to him and called out, "Podrabin," a sarcastic way, of referring to him as "assistant to the rabbi," and asked, "What kind of question did Joseph ask his brothers, 'Hayaish la'chem av? Do you have a father?' Of course they have a father, everybody has a father! The only person who had no father was the first man of creation, Adam, but anyone who was born into this world has a father. What kind of question was it?" The young Joseph Ber Soloveitchik tried to answer, but the Rebbe cut him off. Finally he was

able to blurt out that what Joseph was really asking was, Is his father still alive?

"If he really meant that," the Rebbe thundered back, "then he should have said, 'Ha'od ah'vee'chem chai?' Is your father still alive, not do you still have a father?" Rabbi Soloveitchik states that it was useless to argue with the Melamed.

Then, when the Rebbe began to speak, he seemed to be speaking to some mysterious visitor. The Melamed then explained that the formulation of Joseph's question indicates that Joseph had no intention to ask his brothers about "visible parenthood," he was in fact asking about "mysterious parenthood" (apparently, a Chabad expression). Rabbi Soloveitchik continues his description of the interchange:

In modern idiom, Joseph was inquiring about "existential parenthood," not "biological parenthood." The Melamed explained that Joseph was asking whether his brothers felt themselves committed to their roots, to their origins. "Are you," Joseph asked his brothers, "rooted to your father? Do you look upon him like a tree, the way branches or blossoms look upon the roots of a tree. Do you consider your father a feeder, a foundation of your existence? Do you look upon him as a provider and sustainer of your existence, or are you a band of rootless shepherds, who forget their makor, their origin, and travel and wander from place to place, from pasture to pasture?"

The teacher then stopped addressing the invisible visitor, turned to his students and said, "Do you children admit that your old father represents an old tradition? Do you believe that a father is capable of telling you something new, something exciting, something challenging, something you did not know before? Or, are you insolent, arrogant, vain and deny your dependence upon your father, upon your makor?"

Rabbi Soloveitchik concludes the story:

"Ha'yaish la'chem av? Do you have a father?" explained the Melamed, pointing at my study-mate. I had a study-mate who was considered a child prodigy in the town. He was the prodigy, and I had a reputation of being slow. His name was Isaac, and the Rebbe turned to him and said, "Who knows more? Do you know more because you are well-versed in the Talmud, or does your father, Jacob the blacksmith, know more, even though he can barely read Hebrew? Are you proud of your father? If a Jew admits to the supremacy of his father, then ipso facto, he admits to the supremacy of the Universal Father, the Ancient Creator of the world, who is called Atik Yomim." Rabbi Soloveitchik says that that particular experience made a profound and indelible impression upon him that he has never forgotten.

It is indeed a most valuable lesson, that all of us must incorporate into the very essence of our beings.

May you be blessed.

NJOP expresses its sympathies to the families of the victims of the horrendous mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. May all the families be comforted and may the leaders of our country succeed in finding a way to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future.

From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of Rabbi Yissocher Frand [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Friday, January 06, 2006 12:37 AM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYigash

Why Didn't Yosef Send A Letter?

Yehudah restated to the Egyptian viceroy — who was really his brother Yosef — their entire earlier conversation. In doing so, Yehudah states: "My master has asked his servants saying 'Have you a father or brother?'"

And we said to my master, 'We have an old father and a young child of his old age; his brother is dead; he alone is left from his mother and his father loves him'" [Bereshis 44:19-20].

Rashi comments that in this dramatic appeal, Yehudah stated a falsehood due to his fear of the situation. Rashi is bothered by the fact that Yehudah knew full well that Yosef did not die. He knew that the brothers sold Yosef. How then did he tell an outright lie? Rashi answers that he did it out of fear. He was standing in front of the second most powerful man in the world. The relationship between the viceroy and the brothers was already strained, to say the least. It would simply not have been diplomatically appropriate to tell the truth at that point regarding the fate of their brother Yosef.

The Meshech Chochma argues with Rashi. He suggests that the brothers truly believed that Yosef died. The brothers knew how attached Yosef was to his father Yaakov. They felt that it was inconceivable that after all these years Yosef — if he were still alive — would not have made some attempt to contact his father. If he were still alive, they reasoned, he would have sent a letter.

In fact, The Meshech Chochma cites a Gemara [Kesubos 22b] that if a woman is positive that her husband died (because were he alive he would have contacted her) that testimony is given a certain degree of credence. In short, Meshech Chochma says that we do not need to say that Yehudah willingly falsified his statement regarding the fate of Yosef.

At the time when he wrote the Meshech Chochma, Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk was not aware of an earlier work that was subsequently discovered and printed that supports Rashi's position. The work, called Moshav Zekeinim al HaTorah from the Ba'alei HaTosfos, contains a tremendously novel comment in Parshas VaYeshev [Bereshis 37:28]. The Moshav Zekeinim M'Ba'alei HaTosfos say that the reason Yosef never contacted Yaakov was that the brothers made him swear that he would never do so.

We imagine that the early interaction between Yosef and his brothers simply involved sibling rivalry and bullying. According to Chazal, however, the brothers convened a court and issued a Psak Din [a court ruling] sentencing Yosef for spiritual shortcomings on his part. Part of the sentence, in addition to his sale to the Ishmaelites, was that he be forced to swear that he would never reveal to their father what happened to him or where he was. Yosef took the oath.

In other words, Yehudah could not have come to the conclusion that because Yosef "did not write" that he must have been dead. Yehudah knew full well that Yosef could not communicate with Yaakov because he had administered the oath banning Yosef from doing so. Consequently, we must say that Rashi is correct — Yehudah was forced to tell a falsehood here because of the tension of the situation.

Why Cry Now?

The following discussion involves a psychological phenomenon that I have often wondered about. The pasuk says that when Yosef and Binyomin finally met they fell on each other's shoulders and cried [Bereshis 45:14]. Rashi quotes the teaching of Chazal that they cried based on prophetic knowledge. Yosef cried regarding the future destruction of the two Temples that would be in Binyomin's portion [Jerusalem] and Binyomin cried regarding the future destruction of the Mishkan that was to be Yosef's portion [Shiloh].

The question may be asked, however, why cry now?

I saw one explanation given by Rav Mordechai Pogmeranski of Telshe. Rav Pogmeranski cites the prophetic pasuk "He will eliminate death forever, and my L-rd Hashem/Elokim will erase tears from all faces" [Yeshaya 25:8]. Chazal teach that the words "from ALL faces" (m'al KOL panim) in this pasuk implies that in the future not only will the Almighty wipe away the tears of sorrow, He will wipe away tears of joy as well.

Why should there be a necessity to wipe away tears of joy? The answer to this question depends on how we understand the phenomenon of tears of joy. Rav Pogmeranski explains the reason people cry at a simcha

[joyous occasion] is because they realize that the joy is fleeting. Subconsciously in the recesses of one's soul, the celebrant recognizes that the joy will be short-lived. Therefore, our Sages teach that in the future, not only will tears of mourning be wiped away, even the tears of joy will be wiped away — because in that future time, we will experience joy that is permanent and everlasting.

This is how Rav Pogmeranski explains the tears of Yosef and Binyamin. On the one hand they looked into the future and saw that each tribe would be the home of the House of G-d in Israel. That was cause for joy. But, they also saw that there would be an end to those Houses of G-d and that was cause for crying.

In my humble opinion, I do not believe this is an accurate explanation of the phenomenon of "tears of joy." I would like to suggest two possible alternate explanations of why people cry when they are happy.

First, I believe, that crying is an expression of intense emotion. It is a fact of the human psyche that when emotions are intense we cry. Therefore we can cry for trouble or we can cry for joy. In both cases, emotions may be intense. It is two sides of the same coin: Heightened emotions trigger the response of tears.

I believe that the other reason why people cry at a simcha is that when a person reaches such a milestone in life, he is very cognizant of what it took to get there. Any time we reach such a milestone — like having a child or celebrating a Bar Mitzvah or marrying off a child — we realize the sweat, tears, and toil that got us to this point. Therefore in every simcha there is the feeling of "woe, but how much did it take to get here." In that moment of joy, one feels not only the joy, but also all the pain it took to get to that moment of joy.

This too will explain the above-quoted pasuk from Yeshaya. In the future, when our mouths will be full of joy, the simcha will be so overwhelming that the painful aspect of that emotion — the "tears of joy" -- will be quashed.

However, if we do not accept Rav Mordechai Pogmeranski's explanation, we must return us to our original question: Why did Binyomin and Yosef cry when they met?

This question may be answered by quoting an observation of the Sefas Emes: The wider context of the long-delayed reunion of Yosef and Binyomin was the scene in Egypt, brought about by the whole story of Yosef's estrangement from his siblings and their sale of him into slavery. In short, they were here because of Sinas Achim [hatred between brothers]. They were here because of Sinas Chinam [unjustified hatred].

They both intuitively knew that even though there was now a temporary peace and they had conquered the hatred that existed between brethren, the ugly head of strife among brothers would rear itself once again. That ugly head of strife among brothers would destroy both the Temples in the portion of Binyomin as well as the Mishkan in the portion of Yosef. Since at this moment they were so sensitive to what Sinas Achim and Sinas Chinam can create, when they looked at each other and saw the future Houses of G-d in each other's portions, they said: "this chapter is not yet over." They recognized that the chapter of Sinas Achim amongst the children of Yaakov had in effect just begun. This was the cause for their weeping on such an occasion.

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Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. RavFrand, Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

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from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> via madmimi.com
date: Sun, Dec 16, 2012 at 9:48 AM subject: The Shooting in Connecticut - December 16, 2012

**A Hero in Connecticut
by Rabbi Shraga Simmons**

Where did a first grade teacher get the strength to perform her extraordinary act of bravery?

When a crazed gunman opened fire inside a Connecticut elementary school – murdering 26 children and adults – first grade teacher Vicki Soto responded with an astonishingly selfless act.

Upon hearing the first rounds of gunfire in an adjacent classroom, the 27-year-old teacher went into lockdown mode, quickly ushering her students into a closet. Then suddenly, as she came face to face with the gunman and the bullets flew, she used her body to shield the children.

Vicki Soto was found dead, huddled over her students, protecting them.

We all mourn this unspeakable tragedy.

Yet where did this young woman get the strength and conviction to perform such an extraordinary act of bravery?

In the animal world, this devotion is found to some degree as a motherly instinct. The bear will fiercely protect her cubs, just as a mother is intensely devoted to her children. But how far does it go? Can it even override the most basic instinct for self-preservation?

A parent's greatest wish is for her children to grow, to see them flourish – physically, emotionally and spiritually. With determination and focus, a parent can attain a level of absolute devotion – even at the expense of her own welfare.

What makes Vicki Soto's actions so remarkable is how she developed that same degree of self-sacrifice for children not biologically her own.

She lived with the reality of a profound truth: A teacher is like a parent, charged with nurturing a child's growth, helping to transform their physical lives into something greater.

"Vicki's life dream was to be a teacher. It's what she loved to do," said her cousin, James Wiltsie. This young woman was willing to give up her entire worldly existence, for the higher meaning of caring for these children.

Lifelong Legacy

Deep down, we all want to accomplish great things. We all want to give generously and truly care for others. We all want to use our potential.

A friend recently told me that he's been thinking about his "legacy." Now in his mid-50s, he is haunted by one overriding question that he cannot ignore: How will I truly impact this world?

I told him to sit down and figure out what he's willing to die for. Maybe even read some obituaries, to give perspective on the greater meaning of life.

I told him: Once you've found a cause so meaningful that you'd forfeit your life for, that leads to the more important and obvious corollary: If you are willing to die for something, then that is the highest goal for how you should be living.

There is something deep in the psyche of every human being: Being good is so important that we're even willing to die for it. Yet we too often fall short of these higher objectives – because we get distracted.

Vicki Soto understood that when you live with full focus and devotion, you attain unparalleled power.

The great tragedy is that this remarkable young woman had so much more to give.

Let us ensure that her death is not in vain.

Let's make a plan to discover our ultimate pur-pose and then implement it into day-to-day life. Let's take it one step at a time, so not to become overwhelmed. Let's keep our eye on the ball and not get distracted.

Vicki Soto's great act of devotion should inspire us to take 10 minutes today and ponder: "What am I living for?"

Finding the answer is a big project. But there's no better use of our time and energy. Because if we don't know what higher purpose we're pursuing, then we're living like zombies, just going through the motions.

Vicki Soto was up to the challenge. "She didn't call them her students," her sister Carlee told NBC. "She called them her kids. She loved those students more than anything."

She loved her students so much that she referred to them as her "little angels." In reaching the ultimate level of devotion and saving their lives, Vicki Soto reached beyond the angels.

This article can also be read at: <http://www.aish.com/ci/s/A-Hero-in-Connecticut.html>

from: Rabbi Yitz Etshalom <rebyitz@torah.org> reply-to: rebyitz+@torah.org to: mikra@torah.org date: Thu, Dec 20, 2012 at 11:05 AM subject: Mikra - Parshas Vayigash mailed-by: torah.org

Mikra by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Parshas Vayigash Yoseph and His Brothers (II) I

Then Yoseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Yoseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Yoseph said to his brothers, "I am Yoseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. (B'resheet 45:3)

Subsequent to Yehudah's heartfelt plea on behalf of his younger brother (and ward) Binyamin (44:18-34), Yoseph is unable to control himself. Shooing out the bystanders in his court, Yoseph then reveals himself to his brothers.

There are three questions I would like to pose; two of which are local to this "outburst" of Yoseph, the third which addresses the entire Yoseph-brothers interaction in Egypt until now:

- 1) What caused Yoseph to lose control over his emotions?
- 2) It is clear from here that Yoseph intended to control himself and not reveal his identity - at least at this point - to his brothers. What was his plan that was disrupted by this loss of control?
- 3) The general question: What was Yoseph's intent in the whole charade with his brothers? Why didn't he immediately greet them when they first came down to Egypt? Another slice of this question is, as Ramban asks:

How is it that Yoseph, after living many years in Egypt, having attained a high and influential position in the house of an important Egyptian official, did not send his father even one message to inform him (that he was alive) and comfort him? Egypt is only six days' travel from Hebron, and respect for his father would have justified even a year's journey! (It would) have been a grave sin to torment his father by leaving him in mourning and bereavement for himself and for Shim'on; even if he wanted to hurt his brothers a little, how could he not feel pity for his aged father (Ramban to B'resheet 42:9)?"

In other words, besides his treatment of the brothers in his court, how did Yoseph allow his father to mourn for so many years when he could have easily informed him of his whereabouts and safety?

Rabbis Yoel Bin-Nun and Yaakov Medan, both of Yeshivat Har Etzion, addressed this issue in the first issue of the Tanakh journal Megadim, put out by the Teacher's College of the Yeshiva. A synopsis of their approaches is available on our website (<http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/5757/sup/sup.vayigash.1.html>) courtesy of Yeshivat Har Etzion.

II

RABBI BIN-NUN'S APPROACH

There are two basic facts that must be stressed to understand Yoseph's behavior. First of all, the family tradition until this point (in Avraham and Yitzchak's families) was to pass the mantle of leadership on to one son and to send the other(s) away. Second, we have to remember that even though we, the readers, are aware of everyone's part in the story - the "players" only know what is revealed to them.

Based on this, Rabbi Bin-Nun suggests that Yoseph had no idea that his father was mourning his loss. If anything, the events which led up to his sale convinced

him that father had been convinced by the sons of Leah to reject Yoseph and select them (or one of them). Yoseph knew nothing of the bloody coat, used to convince Ya'akov that he was dead. As far as he was concerned, Ya'akov's lack of interest in his welfare (evidenced by Ya'akov's not looking for him after his "disappearance" in Dotan) proved this point - Ya'akov had rejected him and accepted the arguments of his brothers.

When the brothers came down to Egypt, Yoseph found one opportunity to really find out what had happened back at home - if only he could speak with Binyamin, his full brother! Therefore, Yoseph acted as he did - in order to get Binyamin down to Egypt and then to get him alone (as his slave - at the end of Miketz) in order to find out what had really transpired back in Hebron.

This was, according to Rabbi Bin-Nun, Yoseph's original plan. The plan was disrupted because of Yehudah's impassioned plea for Binyamin's freedom. Suddenly Yoseph was faced with new information which turned his entire perspective around - father had thought him dead and that's why he had never come looking for him! (This synopsis doesn't even come close to doing Rabbi Bin-Nun's treatment justice...)

III

WHAT CAUSED YOSEPH TO LOSE CONTROL?

As mentioned above, one explanation for Yoseph's outburst is the new information - that instead of having been rejected by father, his father had been mourning for him.

There are, however, several other ways to understand his sudden reaction. (Take into account that there are good reasons to reject Rabbi Bin-Nun's explanation - see Rabbi Medan's rejoinder in the Megadim article.) I would like to suggest five of them.

A: AN ACCUMULATION OF COMPASSION

In two earlier passages (42:24 & 43:30-31), we read about Yoseph's emotions and how he had to turn away from his brothers in order to regain his composure. Significantly, in the second passage, we read that *vaYit'apak* - ("he restrained himself"); which is the same word used in our passage - *v'lo Yakhol Yoseph l'Hit'apek* - ("he could no longer restrain himself"). We can understand from this use of the unique word *hit'apek* that the Torah is trying to associate his earlier restraint with the present lack thereof. In other words, the emotional accumulation, climaxed with Yehudah's plea, caused Yoseph to finally break down. This is apparently Rashbam's understanding of the verse.

B: A MULTITUDE OF INTERCESSORS

In our verse (45:1), Yoseph is unable to "control himself before all his attendants" - what is the connection between those who were attending to Yoseph and his inability to keep his emotions in check?

S'forno explains that he was not able to answer all of their questions and request with this heavy load on his heart - which is why he sent them out. Ramban, however, advances a much bolder explanation. He claims that all of the attendants and courtiers, upon hearing Yehudah's plea - which, by the way, Yoseph would have been foolish to reject, considering Yehudah's "plusses" over Binyamin (age, experience, power) - chimed in along with the brothers. Yoseph was unable to control himself in the face of this barrage of pleading, from all around, to have compassion on the young Binyamin and his hoary father.

Both answers A & B understand Yoseph's outburst as the result of "too much" - either an overload of emotions, accumulating from the brothers' earlier visits - or "too many" people pleading for Binyamin's freedom.

C: YEHUDAH'S T'SHUVAH IS COMPLETE

As Rabbi Medan points out in his article, Yoseph was chiefly concerned with ascertaining whether the brothers had done T'shuvah (repentance) from their heinous act of selling him into slavery. [Parenthetically, it is fairly clear from the text that the brothers never sold him into slavery and thought that Yoseph had died. Yoseph, however, had every reason to think that they had sold him, since he heard Yehudah suggest this course of action and the next thing he knew, Midianites were pulling him out of the pit and selling him to Yishma'elites, who took him as a slave to Egypt.] As we know from the Rambam (Hilkhos Teshuvah 2:1), the most perfect form of T'shuvah is a reversal of character as evidenced by acting differently in the same situation. Whereas Yehudah had been willing to sell Yoseph into slavery, Yehudah is now the one who steps forward to take responsibility - and to offer himself as the slave in Binyamin's place. This total turnaround on the part of the brothers' leader and spokesman signaled to Yoseph that their T'shuvah was complete and that he could now reveal himself to them.

D: ANOTHER EVOLUTION WITHIN YEHUDAH'S WORDS

Throughout the tumultuous life of the two wives, Rachel and Leah, we learn much (by reading between the lines via the Midrash and Rishonim) about the role of their children and their staunch defense of the honor which should be accorded each of their mothers. The Rabbis even explain Re'uven's sin with Bilhah in light of

his concern for his mother's honor after the death of Rachel. (BT Shabbat 55b). There is every indication that the enmity felt between Yoseph and his brothers was the direct result of their vying for power - and promoting the Leah or Rachel position in the family.

In reporting the debate between the father and brothers about bringing Binyamin down to Egypt, Yehudah quotes Ya'akov as follows: "You know that my wife bore me two sons..." (44:27) This "wife" is none other than Rachel. For Yehudah to be able to put aside his own feelings about his mother and her sister and to accurately report father's words indicated an emotional evolution. Yehudah (and, by extension, the other brothers) was able to accept Ya'akov's favoritism of Rachel and Yoseph. This turnabout not only emotionally tugged at Yoseph (along with the poignant reminder of his own mother's death) - it also signaled to Yoseph that it was "safe" to reveal himself and that his position in the family was safe.

E: COMPASSION FOR YA'AKOV

When Yoseph finally reveals himself to his brothers (45:3), he makes a strange statement: "I am Yoseph! Is my father still living?" The recurring theme of Yehudah's plea of several moments earlier was father's inevitable heartbreak if Binyamin isn't brought safely back - so obviously the father is still alive! Why did Yoseph ask this question?

S'forno interprets Yoseph's question as rhetorical - "How could my father still be alive after all of these troubles?". The first thing on Yoseph's mind at this emotionally charged moment was his father's welfare. Note the theme of Yehudah's plea:

Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became surety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father." (44:27-34)

The image of Ya'akov's heartbreak and his suffering finally pushed Yoseph's emotional equilibrium far enough to cause him to lose control.

However we understand the cause - or causes - of Yoseph's outburst, one thing is clear. Yoseph felt torn between the "charade" which he found necessary to play out and his deep and abiding love for his family. Something in Yehudah's words allowed him to resolve this conflict, leading to the emotional rapprochement with his brothers and, ultimately, to a tearful reunification with his beloved father.

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From: "Shabbat Shalom" <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> Date: Dec 20, 2012 6:50 PM Subject: Parshat Vayigash - Shabbat Shalom from the OU Orthodox Union

www.ou.org Vegetarianism and Kashrut: What We Value and the Hierarchy of Life

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

Not long ago, an elegant-looking woman was walking her small dog along the street in Manhattan. The dog was perfectly groomed and wore what looked to be a mink wrapping to protect it from the cool, Fall air. The woman regularly bent down to coo and talk to her dog yet when she walked along the street, she passed by numerous people in need without so much as batting an eye.

To what do we assign value?

As Jews, there is no greater value than that of a human life. Judaism teaches that to save a single life is as if to save the entire world. That is, each life is singular and infinite. Human life is of such inherent value that other than the sins of idolatry, sexual immorality and murder, we may transgress all laws of the Torah in order to live and affirm life.

What a statement Judaism makes! To assign such value to human life is to proclaim first and foremost that life is important and that life, human life, is good. How different Judaism is in this regard from the teachings of other people. Consider the difference between the Jewish approach to life and the Egyptian. While Judaism holds human life as the greatest value, Egyptian tradition places a higher value in creatures that are lesser than humans. In the eyes of the Egyptian, the cow or sheep might be sacred!

How different such a view is from Judaism! The creation narrative in Breishit makes clear that all of creation was created for mankind's benefit, so long as we maintain the sanctity of God's creation. God created the world for mankind, but mankind must be responsible in his exercise of dominion.

After the drama of selling their brother, Yosef, to a caravan traveling to Mitzrayim, and having to look him once again in the eye, the brothers are ultimately reunited as a family with their father, Yaakov. Once again whole, they can look again toward the future as they settle in Mitzrayim, the land where destiny finds them and from whence they will ultimately usher the galus and the geula which will create them together as the Chosen - the Am Segula.

Yosef's experience in Egypt, from his servitude in Potipher's house to the treachery of Potipher's wife and his betrayal in prison and ultimate redemption in Pharaoh's court, had taught him well. No stranger had ever been more successful at surviving and even thriving amongst the Egyptians. He counseled his brethren not to assimilate with the people of Egypt, rather to tell the Pharaoh that they are shepherds.

Shepherding sheep, while perhaps not noble, was an honorable task among the Jews. Not so the Egyptians. Herding sheep was anathema to the Egyptians - since all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians 46:34. Declaring themselves to be shepherds was sufficient to convince the Egyptians to grant them wide berth.

But why would shepherds be so abhorrent to the Egyptians? According to Rashi, the explanation is that the Egyptians worshipped the sheep as gods, and therefore resented and despised those for whom these gods served as livelihood. Yet, we later learn that Pharaoh himself owned sheep - "appoint them as managers over the livestock that is mine 47:6" - and that Egyptian animals, including sheep, suffered during the Ten Plagues. Is this a contradiction? Not at all. It seems that the Egyptians detested shepherds who benefitted from their sheep for food, wool, and milk but glorified shepherds who held their sheep in "high esteem", that is, built sanctuaries for them, cared for them and respected them so that they could be worshipped.

Ibn Ezra observes that the Egyptians did not eat any meat and all animal products. In fact, they detested people who did. The irony of the Egyptians' moral "high ground"! These very Egyptians who were so sensitive to the value of animal life did not give a second thought to drowning male babies in the Nile!

What kind of value system holds animals in greater esteem than humans?

People often love their animals, dressing them in fur while their fellows go cold, even defending their "rights" as others go hungry. When they do so, they run the risk of forgetting the fundamental difference between man, the "crown of creation" who was created in His image, and animals, whom God created for the sake of mankind.

Which raises the question, If mankind did not exist, what would be the purpose for animals' existence? Indeed, the existence of animals is intimately related to mankind's existence.

Sefer Halkkarim posits that if one maintains that there is no qualitative difference between man and animal, such people would indeed be more prone to murdering one another. That is why, he elaborates, slaughtering animals for food consumption was permitted after the Flood, so that we humans would understand that there is a vast difference between man and animal. We are ever so much more significant. Eating meat reminds us of our significance and primary role in the world.

It is telling that on the most spiritual of days - Sabbath, Yom Tovim, etc. - we are enjoined to eat meat! Perhaps more telling, we only eat that meat after having upgraded the physical animal to a higher calling by adhering to all that kashrut represents.

Judaism values the physical and the spiritual. They exist hand in hand. It is good to enjoy things in this world - but not if it is done without recognizing the spiritual in it. If eating is merely a physical act, if it is devoid of the spiritual awareness of God's role in providing the food, then regardless of the quality of the food, or the elaborateness of the table, it diminishes us as people and as God's creatures.

Eating, like everything else that we do, demands our attention, our care and our self-respect. We really are what we eat. The laws of kashrut make clear that God is central to even our most physical acts – elevating them to the spiritual.

from: Destiny Foundation/**Rabbi Berel Wein**
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5773

Home Weekly Parsha VAYIGASH

The apparent hero and victor in the epic narrative of the saga of Yosef and his brothers that reaches its culmination in this week's parsha is certainly Yosef. His dreams and ambitions are fulfilled. His brothers and father have bowed down before him as the prophecy of his dreams indicated. He takes no further revenge against his brothers. He houses them and Yaakov in security and prosperity in the land of Goshen and is assiduous in caring for all of their needs.

He certainly emerges from the entire bewildering and tragic events as a heroic and noble figure, still the beloved son of his father and the heir to the double portion birthright of the first-born. Yet, in terms of the long range view of Jewish history, Yosef is not the vehicle of Jewish survival. His kingdom of the northern ten tribes of Israel is relatively short-lived and riddled with wicked kings and widespread idolatrous practice. The kingdom of Yosef is never restored and the remnants of the northern ten tribes are eventually absorbed into the kingdom and tribe of Judah. Yosef's triumph is seen in Jewish history as being legitimate but essentially temporary. It is his brother Yehudah who emerges as the ultimate hero and guarantor of Jewish survival and as the true head of Yaakov's family. The Jewish people are called upon his name and it is through his descendants that legitimate royalty comes to Israel. The future salvation of Israel and the messianic vision of full and complete redemption and a better world for all are assigned to the family and descendants of Yehudah. He is the ultimate and victor in the debate between Yosef and himself that this week's parsha highlights. The obvious question that presents itself is why this should be. After all it is Yosef who is the righteous one, the one who resisted physical temptation and who persevered in his loyalty to the ideals of the patriarchs of Israel under the most trying and difficult of circumstances. Yehuda on the other hand can be superficially judged and found wanting in his behavior regarding Tamar and in his leadership role in the sale of his brother as a slave. So why, in historical terms, is he the hero and savior of Israel while Yosef is not? Though God's will, so to speak, in all of these matters remains hidden and inscrutable to us mere mortals, a glimmer of understanding can come to us from the words of Yaakov that will appear in next week's parsha. Yaakov blesses Yehudah for his ability to rise from error and tragedy and continue forward. It is Yehudah's resilience that marks his character and behavior. He redeems himself from the error of his treatment of Yosef by his unconditional and self-sacrificing defense of Binyamin. He admits his error in condemning Tamar and their children become the bearers of Jewish royalty. The secret of Jewish survival lies in Jewish renewal and resilience. It is the one national trait that outweighs all other factors in Jewish history. It certainly is the one most in demand in our current Jewish world today as well. Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein Subscribe to our blog via email or RSS to get more posts like this one.

from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-
a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date:
Sun, Dec 16, 2012 at 2:50 PM subject: eighth, ninth and tenth of Teiveis.
Special Days of Teiveis
By **Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

When hard times such as, G-d forbid, drought, warfare or plague befall the Jewish People, we must realize that they are not a coincidence – rather, they are a Divine warning to klal Yisroel to do teshuvah. When these difficulties occur, we are obligated to set aside special days to fast and repent. Acting as if the calamities are coincidental rather than warnings from Hashem is actually being cruel to ourselves and results in greater catastrophe. On the other hand, instituting fast days as a means of doing tshuvah fulfills a mitzvah of the Torah (Rambam, Hilchos Taanis 1:1-3).

An extension of this mitzvah is the observance of five days every year that were instituted as annual fast days. Four of these days commemorate events related to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, whereas the fifth, Taanis Esther, commemorates the fast days that were observed when the Jews collectively repented prior to the Purim miracle. The primary purpose of these fast days and all others is to do tshuvah (see Rambam, Hilchos Tshuvah 5:1-5).

In the early days of the Tanna'im (in the days of the Second Beis HaMikdash, at the time of Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai), a book entitled Megillas Taanis was written that listed the days of celebration and mourning observed at that time (Shabbos 13b with Rashi). According to Megillas Taanis, three consecutive days of Teiveis - the Eighth, the Ninth, and the Tenth - were observed as days of mourning. Indeed, both the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim Chapter 580) rule that it is appropriate to fast all three consecutive days because of the tragic events that happened then. Although this is not the common practice, one should, nevertheless, focus on doing tshuvah during these three days.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE EIGHTH OF TEIVEIS?

The Tur states simply that on the Eighth of Teiveis occurred "the story of Ptolemy the King." According to Megillas Taanis, "the world was plunged into darkness for three days." Chazal explain that this event was as harmful for the Jews as the making of the Eigel HaZahav, the Golden Calf (see Maseches Sofrim 1:7), and we know that this refers to the translation of the Torah into Greek.

Ptolemy, the king of the Hellenized (Greek-cultured) Egyptian empire gathered seventy-two Gedolei Yisroel, placing each one into a separate building without revealing his plans to them. Once each was in total seclusion, he commanded them to translate the entire Torah into Greek. (This is why this translation is called the Targum HaShivim, in English the "Septuagint," because approximately seventy Talmidei Chachomim made the translation.)

In the course of the project, Hashem made a tremendous miracle: all the scholars translated the entire Torah in the identically same way (Maseches Sofrim 1:8; Megillah 9a). To appreciate the extent of this miracle, try the following experiment. Ask two people to translate the same pasuk, and see how different the two versions come out. (Even two prophets who see the same prophetic vision describe it differently, as the Gemara explains [Sanhedrin 89a].) Multiply this experiment by the thousands of pesukim in Chumash, and take into account that seventy-two different people were each making his own translation, and you'll realize that the results were truly miraculous (Sefer Hatodaah).

Not only was there no variation between one translation to the other, which is itself beyond imagination, but an even greater miracle occurred. All seventy-two scholars realized that there were parts of the Torah that could not be rendered literally, because Ptolemy might misunderstand the literal translation. For example, literally translating "Bereishis Bara Elokim," could have been misunderstood to mean that some entity called "Bereishis," chas veshalom, created Hashem. To prevent this, they all translated "Hashem created the beginning." In this instance, and in twelve other places, all seventy-two Talmidei Chachomim realized that they had to alter the translation -- and they all made the exact same modification. Considering the potential disaster that could have resulted if even one Talmud Chachom had translated these passages literally while the others altered it makes the miracle even greater.

In one instance, they altered the translation to avoid provoking Ptolemy's anger. Ptolemy's wife's name was the Greek translation of "arneves," hare. The Talmidei Chachomim translating the Torah were concerned that Ptolemy might not appreciate the fact that his wife's name is that of a non-kosher species, so they substituted a description for the hare rather than naming it (see Maharsha to Megillah 9a). (In truth, describing Ptolemy's wife as an arneves was not a coincidence. According to the Midrash, the four non-kosher species mentioned in the Torah allude to the four kingdoms that subjugated the Jewish people, and arneves corresponds to Greece [Maharsha].) **THREE DAYS OF DARKNESS?**

Why did this translation plunge the world into three days of darkness? On the contrary, wasn't it a tremendous Kiddush Hashem, taking into account the miracles that occurred? Surely, such miracles deserved the institution of a Yom Tov and not a national day of mourning! Furthermore, why is this event compared to the day when the Eigel was made?

TWO ANSWERS:

1. According to the Sefer Hatodaah, the reason why this was considered a day of tragedy is that, before the Torah was translated, any gentile interested in true morality had only one address: He had to join the ranks of the Jewish People. There was simply no other place in the world for a person to learn the basis of true morality. But once the Torah was translated, a non-Jew could feel that he understood morality without learning it from the Jewish mesorah. This can indeed be compared to the day when the Eigel was created. In an attempt to find a substitute for true Torah and leadership, Klal Yisroel placed its belief in something absolutely unsubstantial. Similarly, the Torah's translation provided people with a mistaken interpretation of true morality. We see the tragic results in today's world, with its warped interpretation of right and wrong that is so distant from proper morality. One look at today's headlines is enough to appreciate the darkness into which the world plunged.

2. Notwithstanding the Sefer Hatodaah's interpretation, the reading of Maseches Sofrim (1:7, 8) presents a very different story, that implies that the Targum Hashivim was not what plunged the world into darkness. Prior to their translation, Ptolemy had gathered five elders to translate the Torah into Greek, and this was the day that was as difficult for the Jews as the day that the Golden Calf was made. The Maseches Sofrim does not elaborate what was wrong with their translation, so we can only conjecture, but it was obviously something very serious. Subsequently, Ptolemy gathered seventy-two elders for the miraculous story of the Targum Hashivim. There are no criticisms of the Targum Hashivim.

THE NINTH OF TEIVEIS

The Ninth of Teiveis is the *yahrzeit* of Ezra, who was the Gadol Hador at the beginning of the Second Beis HaMikdash. (Sefer Hatodaah records that the Ninth of Teiveis is the *yahrzeit* for both Ezra and Nehemiah, but does not quote his source. The Be'er Heiteiv, Aruch Hashulchan and Mishnah Berurah quote the Selicha beginning with the word Ezkera that is recited on the Tenth of Teiveis as the source for our knowledge of this fact.) When Ezra arrived in Eretz Yisroel from Bavel, he found that the Jewish community was extremely lax in many major areas of halachic observance. Ezra improved the spiritual state of the Jewish people tremendously and established many halachic *Takanos* which apply until this day. With his passing, the Jewish community lost a major positive force. With time, the community in Eretz Yisroel fell from the great spiritual heights to which Ezra had led them. For this reason, the day of his passing was established as a day of mourning.

It should be noted that *yahrzeits*, whether of private individuals or those in memory of great *Tzaddikim*, should be observed as days of mourning. Megillas Taanis notes the exact *yahrzeits* of several *Nevi'im*, including Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon Hakohen, Miriam, Yehoshua bin Nun, and Shmuel HaNavi, so that people will observe them as voluntary fast days and days to focus on doing *tshuvah*. Rashi (Yevamos 122a) mentions that a *tzaddik's* *yahrzeit* should be observed by gathering together to learn Torah in his honor. This is the origin of the *minhag* of a "*Yahrzeit Shiur*" and also of the *Chassidische minhag* of having a "*yahrzeit tish*" whose purpose is to teach Torah.

Because a *yahrzeit* is a day of misfortune, it is a suitable time for reflection and *tshuvah*; it includes certain *halachos* of mourning (Rama, Yoreh Deah 391:3 and 402:12). For example, it is a *mitzvah* to fast on the *yahrzeit* of a parent (Rama, Yoreh Deah 376:5 & 402:12; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 568:7; cf. Gra Yoreh Deah 376:7). Someone fasting on his *yahrzeit* should recite *Aneinu* in the quiet *Shmoneh Esrei*, but not in the repetition, since it is not a public fast; see Kaf HaChayim 565:5. Although this fast begins only at daybreak, festive meals should be avoided the night before. Therefore, one is not permitted to eat at a wedding during the night of the *yahrzeit* (Rama 391:3; Taz and Shach 395:3; cf. Levush). It appears that one may also not eat at a *Sheva Brachos*. However, most authorities permit eating at a *Bris*, *Pidyon Haben* or *Siyum* (*Pischei Tshuvah* 391:8). It would appear that one may attend a wedding or *Sheva Brachos*, provided one does not eat there. I have written an article that goes into greater detail about this topic, which I will issue to this list some time soon.

THE TENTH OF TEIVEIS

We fast on the Tenth of Teiveis, because on this day the siege that culminated in the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash started. All healthy people should fast on this day.

SOMEONE ILL

A sick person is not only exempt from fasting, but is forbidden to fast, even if his illness is not life threatening (Shulchan Aruch 554:6; Mishnah Berurah 550:4).

PREGNANT WOMEN AND NURSING MOTHERS

There is a three-way dispute among the *Rishonim* as to whether a pregnant woman is required to fast on *Asarah B'Teiveis*. (The same *halachos* apply to *Tzom Gedalyah* and *Shiva Asar B'Tamuz*. *Taanis Esther* is treated more leniently.) *Maharam* rules that a pregnant woman must fast, unless she is suffering, in which

case she is considered ill. *Rabbeinu Tam* rules that a pregnant woman may fast, but is not obligated to do so. In his opinion when the fast was established, pregnant women were not included, but they may fast if they wish to share with the suffering of the community. *Rabbeinu Yerucham* rules that pregnant women are not permitted to fast on these fast days. In his opinion, even if they want to fast and feel physically up to it, they are forbidden to do so, because this causes discomfort to the fetus, who is exempt from fasting and is considered to be "ill" (*Beis Yosef*, Orach Chayim 554).

The *Shulchan Aruch* (554:5) rules that pregnant women and nursing mothers do not have to fast, suggesting that he rules like *Rabbeinu Tam* that they may fast if they wish (and are up to it). Similarly, the *Rama* concludes that although they are not required to fast, the custom is that they do, unless they are very uncomfortable (550:1; 554:6). Some contemporary *poskim* rule that pregnant women should not fast, because in our times there is a great chance of endangering the baby (*Shu't Even Yisroel* 9:61). The accepted practice nowadays is that pregnant women and nursing mothers do not fast.

CHILDREN

Contrary to popular assumption, there is no *mitzvah* of *chinuch* (training to observe *mitzvos*) concerning fasts like *Asarah B'Teiveis*. Thus, there is no requirement whatsoever for boys aged twelve and girls aged eleven to fast even for a few hours, and there is certainly no such requirement for younger children (*Mishnah Berurah* 550:5). However, they should not be given treats.

CHOSON AND KALLAH

Do a *choson* and *kallah* fast on *Asarah B'Teiveis* (or on other fast days) that falls during their week of *sheva brachos*? One might think that they should not fast, since the *sheva brachos* week is considered the *choson* and *kallah's* private *Yom Tov*, and that is why they eat festive meals, are forbidden to work and do not recite *Tachanun*, etc. It certainly seems inappropriate to observe a fast day at such a time.

But on the other hand, how can they not participate in a fast day that all of *klal Yisroel* is observing?

The *Ritva* (end of *Mesechta Taanis*) discusses this issue and rules that the *choson* and *kallah* must fast, citing two reasons why. First, he explains that a public fast day supersedes a private *Yom Tov*. In addition, he cites an additional reason, that the *pasuk* states, "Im lo a'aleh es Yerushalayim al rosh simchasi," "Were I not to elevate Yerushalayim above my joyous occasions" (*Tehillim* 137:6). This teaches that we must place the mourning for the *churban* above our own personal joys. Therefore, if the *choson* and *kallah* were to celebrate *sheva brachos* at the expense of observing the mourning of *Asarah B'Teiveis*, it would violate the *pasuk's* message.

Note that there is a halachic difference between the two reasons. According to the first reason, a *choson* and *kallah* who marry the week before *Purim* must fast on *Taanis Esther*, since it is a public fast, whereas according to the second reason they would not have to fast, since *Taanis Esther* does not commemorate the *churban*.

Although some authorities dispute the *Ritva's* conclusion, ruling that a *choson* may eat on these fast days (*Gra*, Orach Chayim, end of Chapter 686) or that someone making a *bris* on these days may eat (*Avnei Nezer*, Orach Chayim #427), the accepted practice is to follow the *Ritva* (see Rama 686:2). Some *poskim* rule that the *choson* and *kallah* do not have to fast on *Taanis Esther* (*Shu't Yechaveh Daas* 2:78). However, other *poskim* cite only the first reason of the *Ritva*, implying that a *choson* and *kallah* must fast on *Taanis Esther* (*Biur Halacha* 549:1).

WEDDINGS ON ASARAH B'TEIVEIS

May one schedule a wedding or other festive event for the night of *Asarah B'Teiveis*, since the fast begins only in the morning? Some *poskim* prohibit this, since the entire day is a day of mourning (see *Shu't Chaim Sha'al* #24; also see *Elyah Rabbah*, *Pri Megadim*, and *Biur Halacha* to 551:2). However, other *poskim* are lenient, at least under extenuating circumstances (see *Shu't Igros Moshe*, Orach Chaim 1:168).

THE TEFILLOS OF ASARAH B'TEIVEIS -- WHEN DOES ONE RECITE ANEINU?

There is a difference between *Ashkenazim* and *Sefardim* regarding the recitation of *Aneinu*. *Sefardim* recite *Aneinu* in all the prayers of a fast day, even the *Maariv* of the night before. *Ashkenazim* recite *Aneinu* only at *Mincha*, except the *Chazon*, who recites *Aneinu* in the repetition of *Shmoneh Esrei* in *Shacharis* (but not in his private prayer).

In *Ashkenazic* practice, only someone who is fasting recites *Aneinu* (*Maamar Mordechai* and *Biur Halacha* 565:1). Among the *Sefardic* *poskim*, this issue is disputed.

FORGOT ANEINU

If someone forgot *Aneinu* in *Shmoneh Esrei*, what does he do?

If he is still in the middle of *Shma Koleinu*, he should recite *Aneinu*, then "*Ki atah shome'a*" and complete the *bracha*. If he has completed the *bracha*, he does not

repeat any part of the tefillah. Instead, he recites Aneinu at the end of Shmoneh Esrei as part of "Elokai Netzor", preferably before saying the pasuk "Yihyu Irtzotz" (Mishnah Berurah 565:6,7; Kaf HaChayim 565:3).

AVINU MALKEINU OR TACHANUN?

After the repetition of Shmoneh Esrei on Asarah B'Teveis, Aveinu Malkeinu is recited followed by Tachanun. If someone finished Shmoneh Esrei after the congregation and the tzibur is ready to begin Tachanun, should he say Tachanun with the tzibur and recite Avinu Malkeinu later, or recite Avinu Malkeinu first?

He should recite Tachanun with the tzibur and then recite Avinu Malkeinu, because there is great importance in reciting Tachanun together with the tzibur, as I explained in a different article.

GIVING AN ALIYAH TO SOMEONE WHO IS NOT FASTING

On Asarah B'Teveis and the other public fast days, we take out the Sefer Torah and read "VaYechal" (in Parshas Ki Sisa) both in Shacharis and Mincha.

There is an accepted custom that we do not call up someone who is not fasting to the Torah on a fast day (Shu't Maharik #9), even someone who has medical reasons that require him to eat.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE ONLY KOHEN IN SHUL IS NOT FASTING?

In order to establish peace and harmony in the Jewish community, the first aliyah to the Torah is always given to a kohen (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 135:4). Nevertheless, if none of the kohanim in shul is fasting, the custom is to give the aliyah to a non-kohen who is fasting. The kohanim leave the shul to allow a non-kohen to be called up in their stead (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 566:6). The Maharik (Shu't #9), the source of this ruling, the posek hador of his generation, uses this practice to prove that sometimes a custom supersedes the halacha. Why? Chazal instituted that a kohen should get the first aliyah. Yet if all the kohanim in shul are not fasting, someone else is called up for the first aliyah, even though, according to the takanah, a kohen should receive the aliyah.

The pasuk promises us that the "Fast of the Fourth (month, the Seventeenth of Tammuz, the fourth month counting from Nissan), the Fast of the Fifth (Tisha B'Av), the Fast of the Seventh (Tzom Gedalyah) and the Fast of the Tenth (Asara B'Teveis) shall be for celebration and happiness for the household of Yehudah" (Zechariah 8:19). May we use the fast days and other days of mourning for reflection and tshuvah, so that the words of the prophet are fulfilled speedily and in our days!

from: Yeshivat Har Etzion <office@etzion.org.il> reply-to: Yeshivat Har Etzion <office@etzion.org.il> to: yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il date: Tue, Dec 18, 2012 at 5:04 AM subject: VBM-Special Shiur for Asara beTevet YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM) ASARA BE-TEVET 5773 YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM) STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA For easy printing, see <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/sichot73/11-73asara-betevet.htm>

ASARA BE-TEVET

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"l

A Kaddish for the Martyrs of the Holocaust Translated by Kaeren Fish

A generation ago, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel declared that the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet, which marks the beginning of the destruction of the Temple, would also be observed as a Holocaust Remembrance Day. Specifically, it would be the day to recite kaddish for relatives whose exact date of death we do not know. Just as the Tenth of Tevet thus has acquired a dual significance, so does the kaddish itself that we recite on this day.

On the one hand, kaddish is recited by each individual for his relatives. On the other hand, when many individuals recite kaddish, when the whole congregation recites kaddish, then it assumes additional meaning. To the extent that we explore this additional meaning of the communal kaddish, the kaddish of each individual will be elevated higher and higher, until the kaddish of each individual will itself attain a power and depth that never existed in the kaddish prayer as recited in past generations. At the time of death of every individual Jew, the Holy One's great Name is diminished, as it were, and so we add to it by reciting kaddish. This may be said of the kaddish of the individual.

But the communal kaddish is the innermost and most authentic expression of the Jewish nation. It demonstrates our faith's attitude towards everything that is bound up with the word "Holocaust" – a word that is only a code for all that took place there. Since there is no word or sentence or article or book that could describe what happened, we use this code word: Holocaust. By reciting kaddish as a congregation, the Jewish nation expresses its feelings towards the Holy One in the wake of the Holocaust. Our religious attitude towards the Holocaust revolves around two axes, both of which find expression in our

religious literature.

One axis is the depthless cry and demand to Heaven: "My God, my God – why have You abandoned me?" (Tehillim 22:2)

"You would be in the right, O Lord, if I were to contend with You, yet nevertheless I will reason these points of justice with you: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (Yirmiyahu 12:1) "Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, nor can You look upon iniquity; why do You look upon those who deal treacherously, and hold Your peace when the wicked devours the man more righteous than he?" (Chabakuk 1:13)

The second axis is a position of subjugation towards God, as expressed in the words of Moshe Rabbeinu: "The Rock Whose work is perfect, for all of His ways are justice." (Devarim 32:4) On the one hand, there is the great question: Why have You hidden Your face from us, why have You forgotten and abandoned us? It is true that the ways of God are hidden, but You bless man with knowledge, You have given us intelligence, human understanding, and according to human understanding there is no justification for the murder of hundreds of thousands of young children who never tasted sin. No sin, however grievous, can justify to the human mind the execution of tens of thousands of mothers with nursing infants in their arms. No worldly attainment can compensate for the murder of those millions. All the claims about the establishment of the State of Israel serving as compensation for the Holocaust are hollow. Neither the State of Israel that exists in reality, that fights bloody wars for its existence from time to time, nor the ideal State of Israel, as in the vision of "Every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (Mikha 4:4), can justify even partially what the nation of Israel went through during the Holocaust years. There is no honest religious response without this plea: "You would be in the right, O Lord, if I were to contend with You, yet nevertheless I will reason these points of justice with you" (Yirmiyahu 12:1).

On the other hand, the nation of Israel bows its head, declaring before God: "The Rock Whose work is perfect, for all His ways are justice... He is righteous and upright" (Devarim 32:4). There is an irresolvable contradiction between these two positions. But that is the power of the nation of Israel – that despite the questions that have no answers, we justify God's judgment. This is the great test of the nation of Israel, the last test in the final stages of the exile and before the redemption: to understand nothing, and nevertheless to declare, "The Rock Whose work is perfect." This is the inner significance of the communal kaddish, and this is also what gives significance to the kaddish of each individual. A kaddish such as that which we recite on Holocaust Remembrance Day has never been heard in such depth in all of Jewish history – a kaddish that expresses this great faith. "The Rock Whose work is perfect," together with "Your eyes are too pure to see evil." This is what gives the strength, the power, the depth to the kaddish of each individual. One who was there – in the valley of killing – could not but see the hand of God; things were so unnatural, so unintelligible, so illogical. I saw thousands of evil Nazi soldiers standing, waiting, sitting and doing nothing, unable to reach the Russian front because of the trains that were crammed with Jews. How is it possible to understand that at the end of that great war, with the defeat of that terrible persecutor, may his name be blotted out, his last words were, "The Jews won!" I shall not go into detail, but anyone who was there saw that the events were not natural. I saw the hand of God, but not the explanation, the meaning; He spoke to me – but I understood nothing. We saw the hand of God, we saw God's word, but what was He saying?

If there was a single point of light in the Holocaust, it was this: there were two camps there; on one side the camp of the murderers, and on the other side the camp of those murdered. Happy are we that we belonged to the camp of those murdered. The heavens and earth can testify on our behalf: if the nation of Israel had been given the opportunity to reverse roles, the nation of Israel would have said that it is preferable to be among those murdered than among the murderers. This is a historical point of light that cannot be overshadowed. Facing a world of murderers, a world that stood by as the blood of millions was shed – we stood on the other side; all the world on one side and we on the other. We know, as the Rambam states in his Epistle to Yemen, that all the hatred that the nations of the world feel towards us is because of our Torah, because of our closeness to the Holy One, and therefore we say, "It is for Your sake that we are killed all day long, that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered" (Tehillim 44:23). But at the same time we state before God: "If we forgot the Name of our God and spread forth our hands to a foreign god, would not God search this out? For He knows secrets of the heart" (ibid., 21-22).

It is not an easy test to maintain our faith after all that, and to say, "May God's great Name be exalted and sanctified." But my heart goes out to those Jews who have no faith, who say, "I believe in man," and that is what gives them strength. For we have seen how far man can degenerate; happy are we, how good is our portion, that we believe in the Holy One, Blessed be He, concerning Whom it is written, "My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Yishayahu 55:8), even with all of our questions. But to say, "I believe in man," and to exist

like that? My heart goes out to them. Instead, we have to proclaim, "Be comforted, be comforted, My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and declare to her that her term of service is complete, that her sin has been pardoned, for she has suffered from God's hand double for all her sins" (Yishayah 40:1-2). Her sin has been pardoned, she has suffered double for all her transgressions that were before, and those that have been since. We still lack psychologists of sufficient depth, of sufficient power, to examine what is happening to people today after the Holocaust. The nation of Israel attempts to suppress the memory the Holocaust, to repress it in every possible way, but who knows if the spiritual destruction that afflicts us does not flow from those scenes that the nation suppresses in its heart? I have on prior occasions cited the Gemara's interpretation (Shabbat 88b) of the verse, "My beloved is to me like a cluster of myrrh (tzeror ha-mor)" (Shir ha-Shirim 1:13) – although He afflicts and embitters me (meitzer u-meimer li), "He shall lie between my breasts." This evening we express all that is in our hearts, all that we have to say before the Holy One, Blessed be He. Our assembling tonight in large numbers says something great about the nation of Israel. Despite our lack of comprehension, despite all our questions, we nonetheless declare: "Yitgadal ve-yitkadash Shemeih rabba," May God's great Name be elevated and sanctified. (This sicha was delivered on Asara be-Tevet 5750 [1990].)

Tracing the Roots of Destruction Based on a sicha by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

Translated by Kaeren Fish The nations of the world generally establish special days to commemorate victories and successes, while preferring to forget defeat and failures. Knesset Yisrael is different: we do not have a selective memory; our tradition imbues our consciousness not only with celebration of glory, but also with commemoration of periods of destruction. Remembrance of the past, with its good and its bad, is part of our essence and our existence. There is a certain value to such remembrance in itself: it involves connecting with the past, contemplating the complexity of our existence, and perceiving the continuum of past and present (and thereby also the continuum of present and future). Historical awareness is stamped deeply in the soul and heart of Knesset Yisrael. However – as emphasized by the Rambam – the fast days, when we focus on our tribulations, exist also in order to open the door towards the future: "This (i.e. observing days of fasting and prayer) is one of the roads to repentance, for as the community cries out and sounds an alarm when overtaken by trouble, everyone is bound to realize that evil has come upon them as a consequence of their own evil deeds ... and this [repentance] will cause the trouble to be removed." (Hilkhot Ta'aniyot 1:2) Today, on the Tenth of Tevet, we commemorate two events which appear to represent two opposite chronological poles. On the one hand, we commemorate the calamity of the siege of Jerusalem during the time of the Temple. However, on this day we also recite kaddish for all those whose date of death is unknown, and therefore this day was designated to commemorate the most recent and greatest calamity that has befallen us – the Holocaust. Of all the fasts that appear in Tanakh, that of the Tenth of Tevet is, in terms of our consciousness of the destruction, the weakest. When we think of the Ninth of Av, we envision of the Temple in flames; the Fast of Gedalia was "the extinguishing of the ember of Israelite sovereignty;" the Seventeenth of Tammuz commemorates five calamities, and the breach of Jerusalem's walls and the enemy's entry is certainly enough to make us sense the imminent destruction. But all that happened on the Tenth of Tevet was that the King of Babylonia laid siege to Jerusalem. For some time, life continued more or less in its normal fashion, and the road leading from this event to the actual destruction was a long one. Thus, our sense of destruction on the Tenth of Tevet is almost imperceptible in comparison with the other fasts. By contrast, the contemporary tragedy of the Holocaust – not only because it took place so recently but also because of its terrible scope – is the most painful experience in all of Israel's history. Furthermore, from a certain perspective, the phenomenon of the Holocaust seems so unique that it cannot be compared to anything else; it cannot provide us with any lesson to be learned – even in the long term. Any attempt to draw conclusions from the Holocaust is problematic. Nevertheless, it is inconceivable that a person should simply stand dumbstruck in the face of such an event and not sense that something here demands to be perceived and learned. I would like to point out one aspect common to both calamities of Asara Be-Tevet. Why do we mark the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem and not just the breaching of the walls or the destruction of the Temple? The message of this commemoration is that after the destruction, we must trace its sources and mark its stages; we must look backwards to events that are not earth-shattering and perceive how the seeds of the destruction on the Ninth of Av were planted on the Tenth of Tevet. The more we study history,

the more we learn that we should not concentrate only on the final act, the cataclysmic event itself, but also on all the stages that led up to it. The moral message that arises from this is the importance of sharpening our consciousness of the unfolding of the past, seeing how the branches sprout forth from the roots. This has great significance with relation to the Holocaust – not so much the Holocaust itself but rather its roots: how did such a phenomenon ever come to be? There are historians who give up in the face of this question, for the contrast between the culture of the German nation and its actions defies understanding. Historical rules, causality and morality come undone at the enormity of it. But at least with hindsight, we have to look back at what came before, what the roots of the Holocaust were, and what moral lessons may be learned from them. William Shirer, in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, tried to get to the roots of the Holocaust. There certainly were roots, but they were impossible to discern at the time of the events. Looking back now, we may point out the music of Wagner, Bismarck's hunger for power, the philosophy of Nietzsche – but none of this would have been discernible at the time. I don't know if we can make any claim today against someone who listened, at the time, to Wagner's music or who was impressed by Nietzsche. But the lesson of the Holocaust is that we now know that it is possible. Prior to the Holocaust, no constellation would have seemed to lead towards it. The roots were not discerned simply because no one had any idea that such a tree existed. But we, the generations after the Holocaust – we know that there is such a possibility, and that we must look out for the smallest sign of its buds. We need to sharpen our consciousness of the connection between siege and destruction – not necessarily out of fear of a second destruction, but rather because if that is what grows from certain buds, then how terrible are those buds themselves! Let us take a halakhic analogy. In the opinion of R. Yochanan: "A half of a forbidden amount (chatzi shiur) is also forbidden by the Torah." Some of the commentators explain that this is because "chazi le-ithtarufei," it can accumulate with another "half-measure" to constitute the full amount of a prohibition. According to this, if there is no possibility of its being added to another half-measure of the forbidden substance, then no biblical prohibition is involved. Such is the position of the Sha'agat Aryeh, who contends that someone who eats a half of a kotevet of food right before the end of Yom Kippur does not transgress a biblical prohibition. But I learned from my rebbe, Rav Moshe Shatzkes zt"l, that if the half-measure is fit to be added to a full measure, then the half-measure itself is abhorrent and forbidden. We hope and pray that the Holocaust was a one-time historical event. But even if so, we need to understand that if German culture was "chazi le-ithtarufei," if it made such a horror possible, then how deep was the rot in that culture! This, then, is the common theme of both events commemorated on Asara Be-Tevet: the sharpening of our consciousness of the stages along the way to destruction. We must heighten our ability to discern what we are looking at, and our sense of horror at what could come about; we must know what a sense of power and militarism can bring about, and what ignorance of the concept of man's "Divine image" can cause. All this is true on the historical, national and communal levels. On fast days, the public dimension is undoubtedly given prominence. The Rambam, for example, emphasizes the idea of collective confession: "And they shall confess their sin and the sin of their fathers" (Vayikra 26:40). However, "awakening the hearts and opening the paths of repentance" applies not only on the communal level, but also to individuals. Each person must open his heart and repent; each heart must engage in its own remembrance. We must develop our awareness of the significance of processes, and not only of results and conclusions. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik spoke of repentance from the path of sins, as opposed to repentance from a particular sin. This is the point that is unique to the Tenth of Tevet. Specifically that which does not seem so terrible, that which "we can live with" – that is what requires rectification on the Tenth of Tevet. The obligation of repentance on this day involves seeing prospectively that which may usually be seen only in retrospect. I do not know whether, on the Tenth of Tevet, the tragedy of the Ninth of Av could have been avoided; not everything is in man's hands. But at the very least, there may have been a chance to avert the tragic conclusion. If not on the national level then at least on the personal level, each individual by means of his repentance on the "fast of the tenth month" can turn the "fast of the fourth month" and the "fast of the fifth month" into days of joy and celebration. (Adapted from a sicha delivered on Asara Be-Tevet 5747 [1986].)