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The Correct Behavior When Dealing with Danger Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Editor's note: more on this topic from Rav Schachter, as well as Dr. Daniel Berman and Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt, can be found at this link.

Many have the mistaken impression that the Jewish religion places much emphasis on death and respect for the dead; after all, we recite kaddish, yizkor, observe shiva, and yahrzeit, etc. This is a gross misunderstanding. The respect that we show for the dead is a carryover from the respect that we show for the living. The Gemorah (Kesubos 17a, see Shitah Mekubetzes) tells us that whenever there is a conflict between kovod ha'chayim and kovod ha'meisim, kovod ha'chaim takes precedence. When the chevra kadisha brings in the aron at a funeral, everyone stands up. People mistakenly think that we stand up out of respect for the niftar, but in many cases we never stood up for him when he was alive, so why should we stand up for him now that he passed away? The Bartenurah (Mishnayos Bikurim 3:3) explains that we are not standing up out of respect for the niftar but rather out of respect for the members of the chevra kaddisha who are presently involved in the fulfillment of a mitzvah. The respect for the living is based on the premise that all human beings were created b'tzelem Elokim. When the Torah requires us to demonstrate kovod ha'meis, it means that even after the person passed away and no longer has tzelem Elokim, i.e. a neshama, we still have to act respectfully towards the body because it used to have a tzelem Elokim.

Of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos, one of the most important is the mitzvah of v'chai bohem v'lo sh'yomus bohem (Yoma 85b). Not only does the halacha require that if there is a sofek sakanah we must violate almost all of the mitzvos in the Torah to save a life, but we are also required to do so even if there is only a s'fek s'feika, a remote possibility (Yoma 85a). The

Gemorah (ibid) adds that even if the likelihood is that by violating Shabbos or whatever other aveira we most probably will not be saving anyone's life, we still do not abstain from the action due to that likelihood (rove - majority).

When Bnei Yisroel were traveling in the midbar for 40 years, the weather conditions were such that there was a slight sakanah in performing bris milah. Most of the sh'votim did not fulfill the mitzvah except for sheivet Levi[1]. They had an Orthodox rabbi among them, i.e. Moshe Rabbeinu. Why didn't all the shevatim ask him what to do about this sofek sakanah? If it is a real sofek sakanah he should not have permitted sheivet Levi to perform the mitzvah despite their pietistic protests, and if the sofek sakanah was so insignificant that it simply should have been dismissed, why didn't he insist that all the shevatim perform the mitzvah of milah?

The Gemorah (Yevamos 12b) tells us that the answer is to be found in Tehillim (116:6), "Shomer p'soyim Hashem." Whenever there is a slight sofek sakanah that is nowhere near fifty-fifty[2], the halacha declares that it depends on the attitude of the patient. If the patient whose life is at risk (or the parent of the patient who is responsible for his well-being) is personally not nervous about the danger, then the halacha does not consider it a sofek sakanah; we apply "Shomer p'soyim Hashem." But if the patient whose life is at risk is nervous and concerned about the sofek sakanah, then the halacha requires us to act based on, "V'chai bohem v'lo sh'yomus bohem", and the sofek sakanah takes precedence over almost all of the mitzvos of the Torah. Shevet Levi had bitachon, and therefore were not concerned, and therefore for their children it was not considered a sofek sakanah, but with respect to the other shevatim who were concerned it was in fact a sofek sakanah, so every shevet was acting k'din.

However, if one individual is not concerned, but the nature of the sakanah is such that everyone is interdependent and the individual who personally is not nervous may possibly spread a disease to others who are concerned about its spread, then the concept of Shomer p'soyim Hashem does not apply. The individual who is not concerned does not have the right to determine for the others who are concerned that there is no sakanah for them.

The Rakanti[3] relates that one of Ba'alei Ha'tosfos was deathly sick before Yom Kippur and the doctors warned him that if he fasts he will certainly die but if he eats on Yom Kippur there is a slim chance that he may survive. He decided to fast, and of course he died. All of the Ba'alei Ha'tosfos were upset over his decision and felt that he went against the halacha.

If a terrorist threatens to kill me unless I violate one of the mitzvos of the Torah, the halacha usually is that pikuach nefesh takes precedence over most of the mitzvos in the Torah. What if an individual wants to put up a fight knowing that he may well lose his life but thinks that by being moser nefesh he will fulfill the mitzvah of kiddush Hashem? This matter was a famous dispute amongst the Rishonim. The Rambam's opinion is that one may not volunteer to give up his life al kiddush Hashem when not required by halacha because this is tantamount to suicide[4]. Many other Rishonim disagreed with the Rambam. However, if there is no terrorist pressuring me to violate my religion, but there is merely a dangerous situation of sickness then all of the Ba'alei Ha'tosfos agreed with the Rambam that it would not constitute a midas chassidus to ignore the sakanah[5].

In determining what is a sakanah and what is not, the practice of the Tanoim always was to follow the doctors of their generation. Every so often the Rambam would take a stand on a medical issue against what it says in the Gemorah and the Chasam Sofer (Teshuvos, Yoreh Deah #101) explains that the Rambam was a doctor and he did exactly as the Tanoim did, namely, to follow the doctors of his generation. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 331:9) also says explicitly that we follow the doctors of our generation even in contradiction to the medicine recommended in the Gemorah. We should certainly do the same as the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch and follow the doctors of our generation in determining what is considered a sakanah and what is not considered a sakanah.

Some well-meaning individuals have blown out of halachic proportion the significance of tefillah b'tzibur and talmud Torah b'rabim and have opted to ignore the sofek sakanah presented by the corona virus when in conflict with these two most important mitzvos. We live in a generation where many b'nei Torah tend to exaggerate the significance of Torah and tefillah. Although their intention is certainly l'shaim Shomayim, we must all keep in mind that when paskening shailos, one may not rely on an exaggeration.

All exaggerations by definition are sheker - a misrepresentation of the truth of the Torah. Rav Chaim Volozhiner signs off quite a few of his teshuvos saying, "Keil Emes, Nosan lanu Toras Emes, u'bilti el ho'em es einenu - the true God gave us the true Torah, and we only look for the truth." Any exaggeration in the area of Torah and halacha is clearly a misrepresentation of our religion. The commentaries on Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 157) refer to the comments of the Maharshal in his sefer Yam Shel Shlomo (Bava Kamma 38a) that to misrepresent a law of the Torah constitutes an aveira related to avodah zorah[6] and as such would be subject to the principle of yeihoreig v'al ya'avov.

With respect to a sofek sakanah the halacha clearly requires that we go extremely l'chumrah. Especially religious Jews, who know that they are charged with a mission in life, should certainly be extremely machmir on matters of sofek sakanah.

Although every word of a poem appears in the dictionary, the poet conveys an idea by putting the words in a certain order. So too, different people can have the same ideas and the same principles, but if you put them in a different arrangement you have changed the whole understanding if each one of the principles[7]. Once you exaggerate the significance of any particular mitzvah, you have misrepresented the whole picture of kol haTorah kula.

[1] See Rashi, Devarim 33:9. [2] See Achiezer, volume 1, #23,2. [3] Siman 166; see Teshuvos Dvar Yehoshua, vol. 2 #94 [4] Hilchos Yesodei haTorah, 5:1. [5] See Mishna Berura 328:6. [6] Because we believe that the Torah is a description of the essence of G-d, misrepresenting the Torah is tantamount to misrepresenting G-d Himself [7] Thoughts 1:22, by Blaise Pascal

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei (Exodus 35:1 – 40:38)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day” (Exodus 35:3) The Sages of the Talmud query the significance of this verse; after all, the Bible commands us in several places not to do “any manner of creative, physical activities on the Sabbath day” (Exodus 20:10, for example). In fact, the verse preceding this command not to light a fire on Shabbat says, “whoever does an act of physical creativity on [the Sabbath day] shall be put to death.”

These are generic prohibitions, which include the 39 acts of physical creativity that according to our Oral Tradition are forbidden on Shabbat (Mishna Shabbat 7:2). “Kindling a fire” is one of those 39, so why is it singled out again in this week’s biblical portion? Philo Judaeus (c. 20 BCE-c. 50 CE), a great Alexandrian rabbi, exegete and philosopher, explains and provides a fascinating spin on this prohibition, taking it to mean: “Do not kindle the fire of anger in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath.” The Oral Tradition forbids kindling a fire Philo interprets our biblical verse to be adding “the fire of anger” against any individual or familial member!

Allow me to record two anecdotes that will provide an interesting postscript to Philo’s masterful interpretation.

There was a young man studying in the famed Yeshiva of Volozhin, bright and especially gifted of mind and pen, who began to go “off the derech” (lose his way religiously).

He was discovered smoking a cigarette on the holy Shabbat. The head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, asked to see the errant student, urging him to mend his ways. The young man audaciously responded that he was merely exercising his gift of free will.

The yeshiva head, who had given his life and finances to the institution – and who continued the difficult task of teaching and fund-raising to maintain his yeshiva even in his later years – was overcome with anger. He slapped the “student” on the cheek.

The mortified young man left the yeshiva and made his way to America, where he became a well-known author and editor of Yiddish newspaper The Jewish Daily Forward. He was for many years bitterly anti-religious, and under his watch, the famous (or infamous) “Yom Kippur Eve parties” were held in the Forward’s building on the Lower East Side.

In the early 1970s, my family and I would vacation in Miami Beach, Florida, where on Shabbat afternoons I would give shiurim (Torah classes) at the Caribbean Hotel. On one particular Shabbat, I was speaking about the Mussar (Ethicist) Movement and specifically about the famed Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, known as the **Hafetz Haim** after his book against slander, I invoked a passage in the Talmud (B.T. Arachin 16b), in which Rabbi Tarfon maintains that “no one knows how to properly rebuke in our times; if one person says to another, ‘remove the flint from between your teeth,’ the other will respond, ‘remove the beam from between your eyes.’”

However, I added, apparently the Hafetz Haim, who lived 2,000 years after Rabbi Tarfon, did know how to rebuke, and how to bring an errant Jew back to God. It is told that a student in the Yeshiva in Radin (the city of the Hafetz Haim) was caught smoking on Shabbat.

The **Hafetz Haim** spoke to him for two minutes, and the student not only repented, but even received rabbinical ordination from the Hafetz Haim.

As I concluded my lecture, an elderly gentleman, who had been visibly agitated as I spoke, grabbed my arm and urgently whispered, “Where did you hear that story?” I told him I didn’t remember, and I didn’t even know if it was true. “It is true,” he said. “**I was that boy**; I was smoking on Shabbat and I have semicha from the Hafetz Haim. The great rabbi spoke to me briefly, after which I willingly and even gladly returned to the Yeshiva and would not leave until I received his ordination!”

We were both overcome with emotion. We left the hotel and silently walked along the beach. Finally, I couldn’t restrain myself. “What did the Hafetz Haim tell you that changed your life in two minutes?” Here is what the elderly man responded, and his words remain inscribed on my soul.

“I was standing in front of the yeshiva with my belongings, ready to leave for home. Standing in front of me was the Hafetz Haim, who took my hand in his and politely asked if I would come to his house. I felt I couldn’t refuse. We walked the two blocks in silence, hand-in-hand, until we reached his home. I entered a very small, dilapidated but spotlessly clean two-room hovel, in which not one piece of furniture was whole.

The Hafetz Haim, who was quite short, looked up at me and said only one word: ‘**Shabbes**.’ “He gently squeezed my hand as an embrace, and there were tears in his eyes. He repeated again, ‘Shabbes,’ and if I live to be 120 I will never stop feeling the scalding heat of his tears as they fell on my hand. He then guided me to the door, embraced me and blessed me. At that moment, I felt in my soul that there was nothing more important than the Shabbat, and that – despite my transgression – this rabbinical giant loved me. I took an oath not to leave the yeshiva without rabbinical ordination from the Hafetz Haim.”

Shabbat Shalom!

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list+owners@googlegroups.com to: **Rav Kook List** <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com> date: Mar 19, 2020, 5:19 AM subject: [Rav Kook Torah] Caution, Yes. But No Fear!

Caution, Yes. But No Fear!

Rav Kook Torah

In these troubling times, many are overwhelmed with fear and anxiety. In the excerpt from Middot HaRe'iyah which I have translated below, Rav Kook speaks about overcoming our fears. Yes, we should be cautious. But not anxious or fearful! Fear itself makes us stumble and fall.

The key, Rav Kook wrote, is cognitive: we must raise our sights to see the big picture. We need to recognize how everything in the world, even the dangerous and disturbing, has its place. By broadening our perspective, we gain the optimism and confidence we need to overcome the crisis and avoid the pitfalls of fear.

Rav Kook concludes with a crucial point: when we study Torah, perform mitzvot and help others, we feel the special joy experienced when one is engaged in holy matters. This joy gives us ometz-kodesh, the “fortitude of holiness” and resilience that we need to persevere in challenging times.

Thus, when the distraught crowds assembled in Jerusalem broke out in tears and weeping, Ezra encouraged them, “Do not be sad, for the joy of God is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

Our source of strength is joy and ometz-kodesh!

Middot HaRe'iyah: “Fearfulness” sec. 4

הַפְּתִיחַ הַזֶּה הוּא פְּתִיחַ גִּמְרוּרָה. אֵין לְאָדָם לְפָחַד כָּלֵל כִּי-אֵם לְהִנָּהֵר. יוֹתֵר שְׂהוּא פּוֹחֵד הוּא נוֹפֵל, וְכִשְׂהוּא מִתְפַּחֵד, מְעַצֵּם הַפְּחַד בָּא לוֹ הַמְּכַשׁוּל.

Fears are complete foolishness. A person should not be afraid at all, just careful. The more we are afraid, the more we fall. When we are frightened, the fear itself causes us to stumble.

Therefore it is important to bolster our recognition that there is nothing to be afraid of. All images of fear are merely scattered colors of the big picture that needs to be completed. When the picture is complete, the [isolated images] will merge together and elicit a robust, tremendous trust (bitachon) that fills the soul with resolve and courage. Even the evil spirits with all of their shadow-terrors are transformed into supportive forces, gladdening and broadening the mind. Their evil and damaging quality is completely nullified, while their life-giving energy is transformed into a force that encourages us with the fortitude of holiness.

“They will obtain gladness and joy” (Isa. 35:10). “The joy of God is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

attend special events. A rich variety of communal facilities and activities have grown up around it. She speaks of “the alchemy of what can be achieved in a village when everyone comes together for a common aim.”

In her column describing this, Melanie was kind enough to quote me on the magic of “I” becoming “we”: “When you build a home together ... you create something far greater than anything anyone could do alone or be paid to do.” The book I wrote on this subject, *The Home We Build Together*, was inspired by this week’s parsha and its name: Vayakhel. It is the Torah’s primer on how to build community.

It does so in a subtle way. It uses a single verb, k-h-l, to describe two very different activities. The first appears in last week’s parsha at the beginning of the story of the Golden Calf. “When the people saw that Moshe was long delayed in coming down the mountain, they gathered (vayikahel) around Aharon and said to him: get up, make us gods to go before us. This man Moshe who brought us out of Egypt – we have no idea what has become of him” (Ex. 32:1). The second is the opening verse of this week’s parsha: “Moshe assembled (vayakhel) all the community of Israel and said to them: these are the things the Lord has commanded you to do” (Ex. 35:1).

These sound similar. Both verbs could be translated as “gathered” or “assembled.” But there is a fundamental difference between them. The first gathering was leaderless; the second had a leader, Moshe. The first was a crowd, the second a community.

In a crowd, individuals lose their individuality. A kind of collective mentality takes over, and people find themselves doing what they would never consider doing on their own. Charles Mackay famously spoke of the madness of crowds. People, he said, “go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, one by one.” Together, they act in a frenzy. Normal deliberative processes break down. Sometimes this expresses itself in violence, at other times in impulsive economic behaviour giving rise to unsustainable booms and subsequent crashes. Crowds lack the inhibitions and restraints that form our inner controls as individuals.

Elias Cannetti, whose book *Crowds and Power* is a classic on the subject, writes that “The crowd is the same everywhere, in all periods and cultures; it remains essentially the same among men of the most diverse origin, education and language. Once in being, it spreads with the utmost violence. Few can resist its contagion; it always wants to go on growing and there are no inherent limits to its growth. It can arise wherever people are together, and its spontaneity and suddenness are uncanny.”

The crowd that gathered around Aharon was in the grip of panic. Moshe was their one contact with God, and thus with instruction, guidance, miracle and power. Now he was no longer there and they did not know what had happened to him. Their request for “gods to go before us” was ill-considered and regressive. Their behaviour once the Calf was made – “the people sat down to eat and drink and then stood up to engage in revelry” – was undisciplined and dissolute. When Moshe came down the mountain at God’s command, he “saw that the people were running wild for Aharon had let them run beyond control and become a laughing stock to their enemies.” What Moshe saw exemplified Carl Jung’s description: “The psychology of a large crowd inevitably sinks to the level of mob psychology.” Moshe saw a crowd.

The Vayakhel of this week’s parsha was quite different. Moshe sought to create community by getting the people to make personal contributions to a collective project, the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. In a community, individuals remain individuals. Their participation is essentially voluntary: “Let everyone whose heart moves them bring an offering.” Their differences are valued because they mean that each has something distinctive to contribute. Some gave gold, other silver, others bronze. Some brought wool or animal skins. Others gave precious stones. Yet others gave their labour and skills.

What united them was not the dynamic of the crowd in which we are caught up in a collective frenzy but rather a sense of common purpose, of helping to bring something into being that was greater than anyone could achieve alone. Communities build; they do not destroy. They bring out the

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Communities and Crowds

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Melanie Reid is a journalist who writes a regular column for *The (London) Times*. A quadriplegic with a wry lack of self-pity, she calls her weekly essay *Spinal Column*. On 4 January 2020, she told the story of how she, her husband, and others in their Scottish village bought an ancient inn to convert it into a pub and community centre, a shared asset for the neighbourhood.

Something extraordinary then happened. A large number of locals volunteered their services to help open and run it. “We’ve got well-known classical musicians cleaning the toilets and sanding down tables. Behind the bar there are sculptors, building workers, humanist ministers, Merchant Navy officers, grandmothers, HR executives and estate agents... Retired CEOs chop wood for the fires; septuagenarians ... wait at tables; surveyors eye up internal walls to be knocked down and can-doers fix blocked gutters.”

It has not only become a community centre; it has dramatically energised the locality. People of all ages come there to play games, drink, eat, and

best in us, not the worst. They speak not to our baser emotions such as fear but to higher aspirations like building a symbolic home for the Divine Presence in their midst.

By its subtle use of the verb *k-h-l*, the Torah focuses our attention not only on the product but also the process; not only on what the people made but on what they became through making it. This is how I put it in *The Home We Build Together*: “A nation – at least, the kind of nation the Israelites were called on to become – is created through the act of creation itself. Not all the miracles of Exodus combined, not the plagues, the division of the sea, manna from heaven or water from a rock, not even the revelation at Sinai itself, turned the Israelites into a nation. In commanding Moshe to get the people to make the Tabernacle, God was in effect saying: To turn a group of individuals into a covenantal nation, they must build something together.

“Freedom cannot be conferred by an outside force, not even by God Himself. It can be achieved only by collective, collaborative effort on the part of the people themselves. Hence the construction of the Tabernacle. A people is made by making. A nation is built by building.”

This distinction between community and crowd has become ever more significant in the 21st century. The classic example is the Arab Spring of 2011. Massive protests took place throughout much of the Arab world, in Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Oman, Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, Bahrain, Libya, Kuwait, Syria and elsewhere. Yet it turned rapidly into what has been called the Arab Winter. The protests still continue in a number of these countries, yet only in Tunisia has it led to constitutional democracy. Protests, in and of themselves, are never enough to generate free societies. They belong to the logic of crowd, not community.

The same is true of social media even in free societies. They are great enhancements of existing communities, but they do not in and of themselves create communities. That takes face-to-face interaction and a willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of the group. Without this, however, as Mark Zuckerberg said in 2017, “social media can contribute to divisiveness and isolation.” Indeed, when used for virtue signalling, shaming or aggressive confrontation, they can create a new form of crowd behaviour, the electronic herd.

In his new book *A Time to Build*, Yuval Levin argues that social media have undermined our social lives. “They plainly encourage the vices most dangerous to a free society. They drive us to speak without listening, to approach others confrontationally rather than graciously, to spread conspiracies and rumours, to dismiss and ignore what we would rather not hear, to make the private public, to oversimplify a complex world, to react to one another much too quickly and curtly. They eat away at our capacity for patient toleration, our decorum, our forbearance, our restraint.” These are crowd behaviours, not community ones.

The downsides of crowds are still with us. So too are the upsides of community, as Melanie Reid’s Scottish pub demonstrates. I believe that creating community takes hard work, and that few things in life are more worthwhile. Building something with others, I discover the joy of becoming part of something greater than I could ever achieve alone.

Previous Britain’s Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years.

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Lessons for the Coronavirus Crisis

How should we respond to the global Coronavirus crisis?

Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen | 19.03.20

There have been a number of requests for me to write about the Torah approach to these drastic times. In this *Dvar Torah*, I will focus on one

aspect of this and will cite sources and stories from Chazal and our Torah leaders, that guide us as to how we should be acting and what we should be thinking during these trying times.

The first aspect is in terms of our actions – the Gedolim have clearly told us to follow the instructions from the authorities with regard to the regulations intended on stemming the spread of the virus. This in and of itself is a fulfillment of the Torah Mitzva of ‘*Venishmartem b’nafshoseichem*’ – you will guard your bodies. This may at times require not fulfilling all the other Mitzvos in the ideal way, for example, if people have to be in quarantine, they will not be able to pray in a Minyan.

However, the following story demonstrates how, in times of danger to health, the primary focus must be on the Mitzva of ‘*Nismartem b’nafshoseichem*’. A man was very unwell and he was instructed by the doctors that he needed to eat on Yom Kippur, but he refused to listen, and planned on fasting.

When the great Rav Yisrael Salanter, *zt”l*, heard this, he came to the man and tried to persuade him that he had to eat. When the man remained in his stubbornness, Rav Salanter made a powerful point: The yetser hara is always trying to persuade us not to perform Mitzvos, but in your case, you are exempt from most of the Mitzvos, so the yetser hara has a dilemma of what it can do to hinder your avodas HaShem. Its solution is to focus on the one Mitzva that you do have – to guard your health! Hence, its attempts to make you want to fast when you are forbidden to do so[1]! We are not exempt from every Mitzva, but it is clear that the Mitzva to guard our health is of primary importance at this time.

Once a person is doing all the necessary *hishtadlus* (effort), then the question arises as to what is the appropriate attitude that he should have. There have been a number of cases of panic among people, expressed in various ways, but their common denominator is that they have caused some people to react with great fear and dread of what may happen.

The following Gemara[2] indicates that this does not seem to be a correct, or healthy, approach. A student was walking in the marketplace, and he began to sigh, indicating his fear of upcoming events. Rebbe Hamnuna told him that by sighing, he would bring upon himself suffering, based on a verse that states that the very thing that a person was afraid of, came upon him. We learn from here that there can be situations where the fear of something happening can be more damaging than the actual thing itself.

The following story involving the Rambam able expresses this point: The Rambam was a leading doctor in Egypt. He was once pressured by a jealous Egyptian doctor to a dangerous competition to prove who was the superior doctor. Each doctor would give the other a poison and he would have to use his medical expertise to protect it from harming him. The Egyptian doctor gave the Rambam a poison, but the Rambam was able to use his great knowledge to dilute its effect and he emerged unharmed. When the other doctor took the Rambam’s poison, he began to become ill. The Rambam gave him suggestions of what to do to save him, but he did not trust the Rambam and suspected that these suggestions would make it worse. Soon, the doctor became very ill and died. It then emerged that the Rambam had not given him a poison at all, rather it was a normal drink, but the doctor worked himself into such a frenzy at the potential harm of the ‘poison’ that his worry caused him to make his fears self-fulfilling. This teaches us that the worry of possible sicknesses can be more damaging than the sickness itself.

What then, can a person do to avoid falling into this cycle of damaging fear?

The answer is to remind himself that once he has done all the necessary *hishtadlus* to protect himself, then there is nothing he can do and he is totally in the hands of HaShem. At that point, there is nothing to worry about, because we know that HaShem only does what’s best for us.

Yet another story demonstrates this point as well: the great Brisker Rav was in Europe at the beginning of World War 2, subject to the relentless bombings of the German invasion. There were times when he was very

anxious about what to do in order to be in the safest situation, and there were other occasions where he was completely calm. When asked about this seemingly contradictory behavior, he explained, that he was anxious in situations where there were various things that could be done to protect himself, and so he was concerned that he would fulfil the Mitzva to guard one's health to the best of his ability. But there were other times, when he had made all possible effort, and there was nothing left to be done – in those situations, he was totally calm because he knew he was in the hands of HaShem[3].

In addition to all these sources, a verse in Mishlei[4] seems to address the exact situation we find ourselves in at this time. The verse states “the spirit of a man with overcome his illness, and a broken spirit, who will carry it.” The commentaries[5] explain that a person should accept what comes upon him with happiness and love, and if he is of good spirit, then his body will be able overcome illness. However, if he is feeling broken, then he will not be able to strengthen himself, and will be susceptible to illness. What is remarkable is that the Targum Yonasan[6] translates the word for illness into the word, ‘korhaneih’ which sounds eerily similar to the word Korona.

It seems clear that HaShem is communicating to us through all these sources that the correct attitude to have is one of vigilance, but with calmness and trust, remembering that HaShem is protecting us. May we merit to see a speedy end to this dreaded disease, and all the world will experience a refuah sheleimah.

Notes and Sources [1] Heard from Rav Mordechai Goldstein, shlit'a. [2] Brachos, 60a. [3] Heard from Rav Mordechai Goldstein. [4] Mishlei, 18:14. [5] Rashi, Metsudas David, ibid. [6] An ancient commentary on Tanach who received a tradition going back to Moshe Rabbeinu.

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Corona-virus Takeaways – One Man's Perspective Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This morning, I rather suddenly and perhaps rashly decided that I would put my thoughts on paper about the current world crisis. I take responsibility for these as my own opinions, although I believe that they are solidly built on Torah sources. Then again, I believe that everything I write falls under that category, and not everyone always agrees.

My first observation: None of us has ever experienced this type of pandemic before. Indeed, the world has become much more populated and much more of a global village in the last few years. There is no question that technology has added hours to our days and years to our lives. Technology provides medical care for the ill, at the same time that it indirectly caused the spread of this pandemic to places unimaginable previously, and with unprecedented speed.

My second observation: Most, if not all, of the worldwide crises that we have experienced in recent decades have been caused by man. Although there have been earthquakes, hurricanes, mine collapses, avalanches, tornadoes, and devastating forest fires, these are all relatively local crises, where people and nations distant from the catastrophe are not affected directly. Even the tsunami that killed hundreds of thousands of people affected only those near the Indian Ocean. In contrast are man-made crises: Terrorism of all types has become and remains a worldwide dilemma, and the 20th century took us through two catastrophic world wars. I do not want to enter scientific and political debate as to whether the crisis of global warming is manmade or not; even assuming that it is not manmade, it is not as acute a problem as the coronavirus is. Although many may be to blame for how they have dealt with this crisis, no one seriously blames mankind for intentionally creating the coronavirus. Without question, this is a direct communication to all of mankind from Hashem. The entire world may perhaps not have had such a direct communication since all the rivers and oceans split along with the Yam Suf. And yet, few people seem to be

attempting to learn any lessons from this. Now and again, I read or hear of an individual Rav expressing his personal takeaways from the crisis, but I have seen and heard no response from a world leader regarding any type of ethical or moral response. Quite the contrary: Politicians have been acting as politicians, rather than as the statesmen whose true leadership we would like to see. I have seen no one act as the King of Nineveh did upon hearing Yonah's castigation – or, more accurately, Yonah's threat.

I want to focus on obvious lessons that Hashem is clearly telling everyone in the world.

The basic instruction in order to limit the virus's spread is social distancing. No hugging, kissing, or even handshaking. Eliminate all social gatherings. Maintain a social distance of several feet. Of what does that remind you? Around the world, people have been placed in social quarantine for fourteen days. Again, this is reminiscent of the laws of metzora, where the maximum time for someone who is a metzora musgar is two weeks. (Although the halacha is that for a metzora, “two weeks” means thirteen days, the association is there. Furthermore, the vast world of Bible readers who do not know about Chazal certainly associate this with two full weeks.) Aside from the prohibition of loshon hora, with which metzora is associated, Chazal have told us that there are many other social malpractices for which the punishment of tzaraas is a reminder and admonishment (see Arachin 16a; Midrash Rabbah on the verses of tzaraas).

My third observation For whatever reason, I had tremendous difficulty remembering the name COVID-19, the official name of this virus. However, two fairly simple memory devices have helped me: The word kavod, ????, (COVID) – and the gematriya of the word cheit, sin, including its kolel (a term for gematriya enthusiasts) equals 19.

My fourth observation: Do we need a crisis of this proportion in order to interact with our children on a daily basis?

My fifth observation: All of life is so unpredictable these days (I guess that's another lesson) that I'll wait to see what tomorrow brings, and then we'll plan. I say this in a country in which until this point, thank G-d, there is some degree of control regarding the spread of the contagious malady; in many countries, the medical facilities have completely collapsed or are in serious danger of doing so. A physician in New York City dealing with the crisis reported to me earlier today that medical supplies are critically low and running out quickly – in the country that many, if not most, people consider the epitome of world civilization and development. To quote some of today's news items: “Hospitals across the U.S. are running out of the masks, gowns and other equipment they need to protect staff against the novel coronavirus as they struggle to take care of patients, say hospital officials, doctors and others in the industry... The Pentagon stepped into the breach by offering on Tuesday to supply up to five million respirator masks, as health-care officials and workers say the situation is dire. Administrators at the headquarters of the Providence health system are in conference rooms assembling makeshift face shields from vinyl, elastic and two-sided tape because supplies are drying up. Nurses from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, preparing for a potential shortage, have pleaded with friends on Facebook for any goggles and other gear they might have lying around. ‘I'm reusing my mask from yesterday,’ said Calvin Sun, an emergency-room doctor in New York City. ‘We really have no choice.’” Perhaps we should have more of a day-to-day relationship with Hashem. As the Gemara states, the manna arrived daily for the Jews in the Desert, and then there was nothing to eat until the next day. When we have no idea what tomorrow will bring, our prayers to Hashem may take on greater seriousness.

My sixth observation – Hashem's chesed #1 As contagious as coronavirus is, for the majority of people afflicted by it, its symptoms are generally no more serious than typical influenza, which strikes the world annually. If the virus spread this way were as deadly as the bubonic plague, AIDS, or various other maladies that have affected mankind, the death rate would be in geometric proportion to what it is. Assuming that this is a

Divine message, wouldn't we prefer this message to some of the alternatives?

My seventh observation – Hashem's chesed #2 Assuming that Hashem needed to warn mankind of something, there is a lot of chesed involved in when and how he warned us. For example, it became a crisis after the tremendous kiddush Hashem of the worldwide Siyumei Hashas, all across the globe. Imagine if all of these siyumim had been forced to cancel! All that incredible kiddush Hashem would not have happened.

My eighth observation: The Economy This crisis without question is destroying economies. What we do not yet know is whether it will set off a worldwide recession, or be a temporary blip that passes soon. Perhaps the answer to this question depends on how we react and respond to it?

My ninth observation: The Elderly Coronavirus has proven much more lethal among the elderly, in which the death rate, I was told, is close to 20% of those infected. Some have stated that the slow response in some countries to the pandemic is related to their attitude toward the elderly and infirm, and perhaps toward the sanctity of life in general.

My tenth observation – Pesach hotels I write this observation with trepidation, since there is an implied criticism of many of my very close friends, and I certainly do not consider myself worthy of giving musar to them. Among the many businesses that this crisis has decimated is the vast business of Pesach hotels. In Israel, a newspaper report anticipates a matzoh shortage caused by the 13% of Israeli residents who are not going to hotels for Pesach this year because of the crisis. Apparently, because they will be home they will need to acquire matzohs, which will cause a shortage.

I was raised in what today would probably be called a modern orthodox family – and Pesach was spent with family. We had a well-established practice that we did not eat in anyone else's home on Pesach, unless we were spending Pesach in that home. Do we want our children to view Pesach as a family experience, or a social one?

I have other observations on the topic, but, as the old adage runs, not everything that you think should you say, not everything you say should you write, and not everything you write should you publish. With my best wishes that: 1. All of G-d's children who are ill should recover. 2. This crisis should pass quickly, and the economic repercussions should be mild. 3. All of mankind should learn the lessons that Hashem wants to teach us.

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Vayakhel Pekudei 5780

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Quarantine, Loneliness, and Unconditional Love

In the Torah portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei, we read about the establishment of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, the temporary temple that accompanied the Jewish nation during its wanderings until the permanent temple was established on the Temple Mount. The Mishkan and the Temple were the nation's spiritual center. This was expressed by the nation camping around it in the desert, and by all legal and halachic (Jewish law) decisions being made in the court adjacent to the Temple in Jerusalem. After the Temple was built in Jerusalem by King Solomon, it became the only place where sacrifices were permissible, and the nation's only legitimate spiritual center. The parasha describing the Mishkan's establishment is called Vayakhel, from the word for gathering and union. This is to teach us that a spiritual center which is not based on unity has no value or right to exist. Our sages note that one of the reasons leading to the destruction of the Temple was baseless hatred. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, the chief rabbi of the Land of Israel at the beginning of the 20th century, wrote, "If we were destroyed, and the world was destroyed along with us, because

of baseless hatred, we will be rebuilt, and the world will be rebuilt along with us, by unconditional love" (Orot Hakodesh 3, pg. 324). Seemingly, these words are particularly relevant to the unusual situation we have found ourselves in these past few weeks. The entire world has recently entered a state of emergency due to the spread of the coronavirus. Millions of people are in quarantine, hundreds of thousands have fallen ill, and sadly, thousands have died of this virus. These are difficult times. We all send wishes for a speedy and complete recovery to all those who are sick, and condolences to the bereaved families. Our hearts are with you! It is imperative that we all behave responsibly in accordance to the directions we are getting from the authorities, each country following its health experts' guidance. No one has the privilege to behave irresponsibly because he can harm others. This is in addition to the Jewish value "and you shall watch yourselves very well" (Deuteronomy 4, 15). According to Jewish tradition, times of distress like the one we are in now are times for introspection. The individual and society are called upon to think about what they should repair. It seems that this virus that put millions of people into quarantine is hinting to us that there are two areas we should try to strengthen: the value of family, and the phenomenon of loneliness. Families going into quarantine together – parents with their children – offers an opportunity to repair what we sometimes can't manage to implement. These days can be days of quality time, in which we, the parents, can listen to our children, talk to them, laugh, tell stories – do everything we always want to do but can't find time for. This is a time for renewing and reinvigorating our frayed family relationships. And, as we said, it's a time for introspection, for thinking about whether we may have slightly neglected our spirit, unity, and community, paying exaggerated attention to individualism and "being in the now". This coerced ingathering of family reminds us where the true source of strength lies, what values are truly important to us, what we are really proud of – not career or financial success – but values of spirit, faith, morality, and family. Furthermore, the coronavirus that put many of us into quarantine reminds us that there are people who are always socially isolated. Do we notice those people who suffer from chronic loneliness, who return to an empty home night after night, those who have no family, or no parents; those who are at home waiting for someone to smile at them, to hear their voice? They are lonely. Do we remember these lonely people? Do we do enough for them? Loneliness can be excruciating, but it is also easy to help – with a smile, a good word, attention, a short phone call. If each of us remembers one person and makes sure to send a message, to call occasionally, maybe invite them to join you on a walk, or for a meal, or anything else that is shared – it might actually save their life. How can we heed that call? How can we make sure people understand the horrible feeling of loneliness? How can someone who does not suffer from loneliness understand someone who does? The coronavirus and the quarantine that has been imposed on us give us a bit of a taste of what loneliness feels like. We suddenly miss the social encounters we are accustomed to. Now we understand how much our work colleagues are part of our lives. Now we understand how much society contributes to our lives, and what a wonderful ability we have to lessen someone else's loneliness! Maybe now is the time to call out to everyone: Adopt another person, one lonely person, and make him or her happy! Each and every one of us can make this world happier, one in which more people walk around with smiles on their faces. If we increase unconditional love, in the merit of this, our prayers will be heard and we will overcome this threatening virus and get through these trying times in peace, health, and happiness. The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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Weekly Parsha VAYAKHEL – PIKUDEI **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Moshe gathers all of the people of Israel into the courtyard of the Tabernacle to instruct them about the observance of the sanctity of Shabbat. That is the content of the lead verse of this week's Torah reading. The obvious question raised by all of the Torah commentators is whether there was insufficient physical space outside the Tabernacle to hold the entire population of the Jewish people. Talmud and Midrash, therefore, resort to a miraculous supernatural understanding of the event.

They state that here we are taught the concept that the small and few can somehow contain and hold the large and many. We naturally consider this to be miraculous. But in the realm of the Almighty, where space and time do not really exist, there is no problem in having millions occupy a limited area of space. And since the Tabernacle, and later the Jerusalem Temples, were miraculous in their very nature and essence, even in their construction, it is obvious that such a supernatural phenomenon existed to gather all the Jewish people within a limited area.

The Talmud asserts that the Jewish people in that generation were accustomed to miracles and to the supernatural events. With regular exposure to the supernatural, it eventually makes it natural and easily accepted. The Torah also assumes that those that study Torah will never discount the presence of the supernatural in the Jewish narrative. In Jewish thought and experience, the dividing line between natural and supernatural is blurred. The Tabernacle is proof of this axiom.

The Talmud instructs us that this miracle of the limited containing unlimited also existed in the times of the Temple in Jerusalem. Pirke Avot teaches that the Jews in the Temple courtyard stood pressed against one another. However, during the Temple service, when the moment arrived for everyone to kneel and prostrate themselves before the Holy Presence, there was sufficient space for all to do so comfortably. The great moral and practical lesson derived from this phenomenon is obvious and telling. When people insist on standing erect, in protecting their own perceived interests and turf, the world is very crowded and there is always hostility to neighbors and companions. However, if we are willing to bow down, certainly to God – but even towards the needs and dignity of other human beings, there will always be enough space and room for all.

The Lord has so fashioned human society in a way that successful living – be it in the milieu of family or community or economic well-being -- is always dependent on accommodating others. The customer is always right is the key to successful commercial enterprise. It is not within our nature to bow down easily. The Torah emphasizes, time and again, our individual responsibility to society as a whole. The tabernacle and Jerusalem Temples came to represent this basic concept of flexibility over rigidity and humility over selfish arrogance. Even though the Temple is not yet in our midst physically, its spiritual message certainly is with us. Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayakhel

The Will To Do More Than Is Necessary Pleases the Almighty

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
In Parshas Vayakhel, the pasuk says, “Moshe commanded and they proclaimed in the camp, saying, ‘Man and woman shall not do more work toward the portion of the Sanctuary!’ And the nation was held back from bringing. And the work was sufficient for them for all the work, to do it – and having a surplus.” [Shemos 36:6-7] Moshe let out a clarion call that there was nothing more to bring, and the people stopped bringing. They already had more than necessary to complete the job.
Rashi comments on the word “Vayeekeh” (and the nation was held back): This is an expression of restraint (m’neeyah). I heard an observation from the Tolner Rebbe, shlit”a, explaining why the Torah in fact uses the language

“Vayeekeh” rather than using the virtually synonymous word that Rashi uses to translate “Vayeekeh” (namely — the root word m’neeyah). In fact, the root mem-nun-ayin that Rashi uses is much more common than the word “Vayeekeh.” For instance, the expression Yakov uses in deflecting Rachel’s complaint to him: “...Am I in place of G-d who has restrained you (asher ma-nah mi’mekh) from having children?” [Bereshis 30:2]. Likewise, we find this usage when Balak tells Bilaam: “Behold Hashem has restrained you (me’na-acha) from receiving honor” [Bamidbar 24:11]. In truth, there are numerous examples of each of these two synonyms. However, this is an interesting observation and the Tolner Rebbe explains this observation in a fantastic way.

The Medrash says in Parshas Pekudei, on the above quoted pasuk (“and the work was sufficient...”): Moshe came into Bezalel and saw that there was leftover material after the work of the Mishkan was completed. He asked the Almighty – “Master of the Universe, we have completed the work of the Mishkan and have leftovers – what should we do with the leftover money?” The Medrash continues: “The Almighty responded and said ‘Go make with them a Mishkan for the Testimony (Eidus)’.”

This is a very difficult Medrash to understand. The Mishkan is finished. Everything is complete. Bezalel tells Moshe they have a surplus. Moshe goes to the Almighty and asks what he is supposed to do with the surplus, and Hashem says to make a Mishkan for the Eidus. What is that supposed to mean?

The Yefei Toar on the Medrash says that there was a shteeble next to the Mishkan. It was a small little synagogue, perhaps like a Beis Medrash. This is a very difficult interpretation. So what does it mean that the Almighty instructed Moshe to take the surplus and make a “Mishkan l’Eidus”?

The Tolner Rebbe says that the Chidushei haRim (the first Gerer Rebbe) once heard a very interesting observation from the Rebbe, Reb Bunim: When a person does any type of mitzvah – whether it is giving charity or davening, whatever it may be – and the person has the desire and the initiative to do even more than he has already done – that gives the Almighty nachas Ruach. A person’s will to do more (when there is really nothing more to do) gives the Almighty a certain satisfaction of Spirit that is even greater than He receives from the basic act itself.

A person needs to have a Chassidische soul to appreciate this insight: We say in davening (at the end of Yishtabach) “The one who chooses musical songs of praise” (ha’bocher b’sheerei zimrah). The Rebbe Reb Bunim would say, “ha’bocher b’sheeyarei zimrah”, meaning the Almighty chooses that which is left over from davening.

Most of us finish davening – especially a long davening – and say, “Baruch Hashem, davening is over!” However, if someone has a desire – if only I could daven more... If after Yom Kippur, a person feels “I wish I could stay longer...” That is an example of “ha’bocher b’sheeyarei zimrah”, the One who chooses the leftovers of davening!

The Eliyahu Rabbah mentions the widespread Jewish custom to sing Adon Olam at the end of davening. Where does this come from? He gives a beautiful explanation: When we finish davening, the Satan says “Aha! Do you see? They are finished and glad to go home!” No. We want to stay. What is the proof that we want to stay? It is the fact that we remain by our seats to recite Adon Olam after davening concludes. Adon Olam appears at the beginning of the siddur. We start davening with it. Therefore, by reciting it after davening, we are proclaiming – I would really want to start davening all over again! The proof? “Adon Olam” – this is exactly where I began three hours ago! This is “ha’bocher b’sheeyarei zimrah”.

The Chidushei haRim says that what happened by the Mishkan was that the people wanted to give even more. Moshe Rabbeinu told the Almighty “There is left over! The people want to give more!” The Almighty says “Go and make of them a Mishkan haEdus. Now, I want to reside with them. This echoes the vort everyone says at the beginning of Parshas Terumah: “They should take for Me a donation and I will dwell in their midst” (not in its midst – i.e. the Mishkan’s midst; but rather in their midst – i.e. in the midst

of the Children of Israel). Here too, the desire they have to keep on giving demonstrates that they were not satisfied with merely their basic donation (which sufficed to build the Mishkan completely). That is the meaning of the Midrash's statement "Aseh ba'hem Mishkan ha'Edus" i.e. – make with them (the people), [not with "it" (the money)] a Mishkan haEdus. They will be the Mishkan. I want to be with them. The resting of the Divine Presence will be amongst those people who possess such a desire (they'shek) to donate more and more.

The Malbim, who is a master of nuance of the Hebrew language, wrote a volume called Sefer haKarmel, in which he explains the differences between various similar words. He discusses the difference between the expression va'Yeekaleh (as it appears in Shemos 36:6) and the expression me'neeah (which Rashi uses to explain the word va'Yeekaleh). He says that va'Yeekaleh is used when by nature one would want to do more, but one is stopped from proceeding. The proof is that the Hebrew word for prison is "Beis haKe'lah" (kaf-lamed-aleph), as it appears in Bamidbar 11:28, where Yehoshua tells Moshe about Eldad and Meidad: "My master, Moshe, Kela'im – throw them in jail!" Why? It is because a person is jailed against his will. I want to be free. They put me in jail – that is the "Beis haKe'lah". The word "me-nee-ah," on the other hand, says the Malbim, does not indicate stopping caused by an outside force, but rather it indicates something that stops on its own.

The Malbim explains that this is the interpretation of the Rashi in our Parsha. The Biblical word Va'Yeekaleh in the expression "and the nation stopped bringing" is appropriate because over here Klal Yisrael wanted to keep on giving. They did not want it to end. They wanted to contribute even more. The Almighty says this is literally a "shiyarei zimra" – this is what I love. The Malbim cites parallel usage by the cessation of rain in Parshas Noach. The pasuk says, "The rain from Heaven was restrained." (va'Yeekaleh hamayim min haShamayim) [Bereshis 8:2]. Why? It is because the nature of rain is to descend. The Almighty had to hold it back, an act that went against nature. When the desire is there but outside forces stop it, the Torah uses the word va'Yeekaleh.

With this, the Chidushei haRim gives an amazing interpretation of a famous Gemara [Bava Metzia 62a]. Two people are walking in the desert and one has a jug of water in his hand. If they each consume half the jug, they will both die. If one of them drinks the entire jug, he will be able to make it out of the desert to civilization (and the other will die). What does the person with the jug of water do? Does he share it with his friend and they both die or does he drink it all himself, giving himself a chance to live?

Ben Petura rules that it is preferable that they both drink and both die and not have one witness the death of his friend. The Gemara continues "...until Rabbi Akiva came and expounded: 'And your brother shall live with you' [Vayikra 25:36] – your own life takes priority over the life of your friend." The Chidushei haRim asks a question: What does it mean, "Until Rabbi Akiva came and expounded"? The Gemara does not frame this in the form of a standard disagreement between two Tana'im – Ben Petura says one thing; Rabbi Akiva says another thing. What do the words "ad she'ba Rabbi Akiva" imply?

The Chidushei haRim answers that when a person is in that type of situation, he is supposed to feel "I want to give you the water. My will is actually to share the water with you. I do not want to stand idly by and watch you die!" UNTIL RABBI AKIVA CAME ALONG and said you cannot do that! Without Rabbi Akiva's teaching, I would have held – this is my will – to share the water. In other words, a person should not just view this as a machlokes Ben Petura and Rabbi Akiva and happily apply the principle that we rule like Rabbi Akiva over any individual colleague with whom he argues and thereby bid his friend farewell and drink the contents of the jug. No! He should want to share the jug! That should be his inclination UNTIL RABBI AKIVA CAME ALONG and gave him no choice because he taught, "your own life takes priority."

This principle is that even if a person is prevented by outside forces – be it nature, be it halacha, be it the fact that no more supplies are necessary for the Mishkan, whatever it is – but the will and desire to do more than is necessary or more than is required should be there. This will and desire pleases the Almighty and it is about this will (to contribute even more to the Mishkan) that He said – take it and make with it (yourselves) a Mishkan l'Edus – the dwelling place of the Divine Presence in the sense of "And you shall make Me a Mikdash and I will dwell BACHEM." I will not only dwell in the Mishkan, but I will dwell within you as well.

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayakhel- Pekudei
פרשת ויקהל-פקודי תשפ
ויעש בצלאל את הארון עצי שטים אמתים וחצי ארכו ואמה וחצי רחבו
Bezalel made the Aron of Shittim wood, two and a half amos its length, an amah and a half its width. (37:1)

One of the miracles that occurred both in the *Mishkan* and in the *Bais Hamikdash* was: *Makom ha'Aron einu min ha'middah*; "The place occupied by the *Aron HaKodesh* was not included in its measurement." This means that the *Aron* did not take up any space. The *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, Holy of Holies, was ten *amos*, cubits, by ten *amos*. The *Aron* was two and a half *amos* by one and a half *amah* by one and a half *amah*. When the *Aron* was brought into the *Kodesh HaKedoshim* and the space from its width and length was measured, every side of it allowed for a space of five *amos*. This was a special miracle in which a room that was 10x10, yet contained a "box" that was 2½ by 1½, still allowed for 5 *amos* of space on each side (a total of 10 *amos*, which was the size of the room). In other words, the *Aron* did not take up any space. Bearing this in mind, the commentators ask a compelling question: What is of greater spiritual significance: the *Aron* or the *Luchos*, Tablets, which were inside of it? – Or, alternatively, which one possesses a greater degree of *kedushah*, holiness: the *Aron* or the *Luchos*? Certainly, the response to this question is: the *Luchos*. They are the reason and purpose for the *Aron*. So, if the *Aron* did not occupy any space, then surely the *Luchos*, which maintained a higher degree of *kedushah*, should not have occupied any space. We know, however, that this is not true, for *Chazal* teach that the *Luchos* took up just about every inch of space within the *Aron*. [There is a dispute whether there remained one *tefach*, handbreadth, for the *Sefer Torah*.] Why did the *Aron* "deserve" a miracle, whereas the *Luchos* did not?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, cites a powerful explanation. *Chazal* teach that the *Aron* serves as a metaphor for the *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. The following *pasuk* reflects an example, *Mibayis u'mibachutz tetzapenu*, "From within and without, it should be covered with gold" (*Shemos* 25:11). (The *Aron* was actually comprised of three units, an outer gold shell, which contained an inner wooden box that contained within it another gold box.) This teaches us that the Torah scholar must be *tocho k'baro*, his external self must express his true inner essence.

Having said this, let us analogize the *talmid chacham* to the *Aron*. The Torah scholar is wholly devoted to Torah; his entire essence is subsumed by it. Thus, the Torah scholar (aptly compared to the *Aron*) takes up no space. He views himself as a nonentity, as nothing – so great is his humility. The Torah within him, however, takes up every bit of him. No area within the Torah scholar is devoid of Torah. This is the definition of *kulo Torah*, all (of him is filled with) Torah. The more Torah, the less "himself."

Horav Eliyahu Mishkovsky, zl, was the distinguished *Rav* of Kfar Chassidim. Ten years before the saintly *Rav* left this world, he was taken

gravely ill. It became so serious that when he lay comatose in Haifa's Rambam Hospital, the physician in charge of his care declared, "We are done. There is no more we can do." He despaired of seeing the *Rav* regain consciousness and be cured. On *Erev Yom Kippur*, *Horav Chaim Greinman* visited and related that he had spoken with a top neurologist at Hadassah Hospital in Yerushalayim concerning the *Rav's* diagnosis. The neurologist claimed that if the *Rav* would survive the ambulance trip from Rambam to Hadassah, he felt that he could save him.

After some discussion, the decision was made to make the move. The comatose patient was driven in an ambulance (outfitted with the necessary therapeutic accouterments for keeping him alive) by two EMS technicians, accompanied by *Rav Greinman* and *Rav David Mishkovsky*, the patient's brother. In midst of the journey (somewhere between Haifa and Yerushalayim) *Rav Eliyahu* opened his eyes, looked at *Rav Chaim* and said, "Nu, *Rav Chaim*, tell me a *chiddush*, original Torah thought." Understandably, *Rav Chaim* was in a state of shock and could not speak. *Rav Eliyahu* asked again, "*Rav Chaim*, I asked you for a *chiddush*." The patient was totally oblivious to his condition and his surroundings. After asking one more time for a *chiddush* and receiving no response, he said, "Fine, so I will say a *chiddush*," which he proceeded to do. After a few minutes of reciting a passage of *Talmud*, a question, an answer, a logical conclusion, followed by a penetrating analysis, the patient closed his eyes and lay his head down. Was this a miracle? Probably. Was this a manifestation of a person who was *kulo Torah*? – Certainly.

Chazal (*Horayos* 13a) teach: *Shlomo Hamelech* writes (*Mishlei* 3:15) concerning the Torah, *Yekarah hee miPeninim*, "It is more precious than pearls." This means that the Torah (of a Torah scholar) is more precious (precedes) than even a *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, who enters the innermost chamber (*Kodesh HaKedoshim lifnai v' lifnim*) in the *Bais Hamikdash*. This refers to the *halachah* that a *mamzer talmid chacham*, Torah scholar of illegitimate pedigree, takes precedence even over a *Kohen Gadol*. Torah is the greatest honorarium. *Rav Karlinstein* quotes the *Gaon, zl, m' Vilna*, who explains why Torah is more precious than pearls. The *Kohen Gadol* is the only one who is permitted to enter the Holy of Holies on the holiest day of the year – *Yom Kippur*. While he is there, he performs the *Ketores*, Incense, service which consists of placing a pan with burning coals on the floor of the *Kodesh HaKedoshim* as he stands *bein haBadim*, between the Poles, that jutted out of the *Aron*. During the Second *Bais Hamikdash*, when the *Aron* was no longer extant, he placed the pan with the coals on the *Even Shesiyah*, foundation stone, which took the place of the *Aron*, for this Priestly service.

The *Kohen* was permitted to stand only between the *Badim* – no more. He could go no further. The *talmid chacham*, by virtue of his study, enters into the *Aron HaKodesh* by clinging to the Torah; he becomes one with the Torah. Indeed, he resides within the *Aron HaKodesh*. This is the precious achievement of a *talmid chacham*, something for which even the *Kohen Gadol* cannot aspire – unless he is a *talmid chacham*.

In order to explicate the concept of *kulo Torah*, I cite from *Horav Pinchas Teitz's* introduction to his 1989 edition of *Tzafnas Paaneach – Bava Metzia*, where he renders a personal appreciation of the venerable *Rogathchover Gaon, zl*. "It is not within the power of a man's pen to describe the gigantic character of the genius of the ages, the *Rogathchover*... In his entire perception and his entire being, there was only Torah. The Torah filled the cosmos he inhabited. This does not mean that he was cut off from the world of action – he knew and understood all the events and problems of the world and all that was happening with a profound, clear knowledge – but his approach was to examine everything through the Torah. In every case, he tried to penetrate to the *halachic* essence... In all events of the world, he saw only Jewish laws... We think of three dimensions for physical matter: length, width and height. He innovated that everything has a fourth dimension, the dimension of *halachah* that is found in everything... He was unable to distract himself from concentrating on the Torah for even a moment. The Torah was always before his eyes... He could see what he had

learned – not just remember it. There was never a hint of sadness on his countenance, and, even when he endured pain, an expression of joy and contentment never left his face." *Kulo Torah*.

אלה פקודי המשכן משכן העדות *Pekudei*

These are the mountings of the *Mishkan*, the *Mishkan* of Testimony. (38:21)

The word *Mishkan* is repeated (*Rashi*, citing the *Midrash*), alluding to the two *Batei Mikdash* (replacing the *Mishkan*) which were taken from us. The word *Mishkan* has the same letters as the word *mashkon*, which means collateral. This intimates (say *Chazal*) that the two *Batei Mikdash* are collateral for *Klal Yisrael's* sins. When we sinned, we lost them, and they are being held in lieu of our repentance, after which the *Bais Hamikdash* will be restored to its previous glory.

Veritably, in Jewish society, the most important place of worship is one's own heart. The purpose of the *Mishkan's* services was to remind us to live our lives in such a manner that Hashem would be "comfortable," feel at home with us – in our lives and in our hearts. The *Bais Hamikdash* replaced the *Mishkan* as the focus of service. As long as its purpose was being fulfilled, it was untouchable. Once we chose to become apathetic to the vibrancy and centrality of our relationship with Hashem, however, the *Bais Hamikdash* no longer served a purpose. Its services became meaningless, so that Hashem destroyed the edifice. We destroyed the services; thus, the building was no longer necessary. The *Batei Mikdash* were not destroyed; they simply died when we refused to sustain them through commitment and passion.

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, posits that actually only one *Bais Hamikdash* existed. The *Bais Hamikdash* was the edifice in which Hashem's *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, resided. When *Klal Yisrael* sinned, Hashem removed the *Shechinah* as collateral until we would do *teshuvah*, repent, and then be worthy of the return of the *Shechinah*. The *churban*, destruction, of the edifice is the collection of collateral. We owe; Hashem collects the *mashkon*, much like the poor man who is unable to reimburse his debt. His lender takes whatever valuables the borrower has and holds it until that time that the borrower is able to pay his loan. Thus, Hashem collected His collateral twice. There was only one edifice. Hashem took it twice.

ויערך עליו ערך לחם לפני ד' כאשר צוה ד' את משה

He prepared on it the setting of bread before Hashem, as Hashem commanded Moshe. (40:23)

Everything in the *Mishkan* was carried out precisely as Hashem had commanded Moshe *Rabbeinu* – no more – no less – no infusion of self. Their personal zeal and enthusiasm in every aspect of their work were completely subordinated to the commands of Hashem. None of the craftsmen made any attempt to inject their own ideas or their own individuality to the construction of the *Mishkan*. They executed their mission obediently, with scrupulous care and precision, with unabashed joy at having been able to serve Hashem. By doing this, they achieved the sublime moral perfection which characterizes an *eved*, servant, of Hashem.

B'diyuk, precisely, expressly, rigorously: all these terms describe what it means to carry out a *mitzvah*/mission in accordance with Hashem's command. By performing exactly as Hashem instructs us, we become totally devoted to Him as *avadim*, slaves. The concept of precisely following instructions is underscored through the two following vignettes (related in *Nachalas Tzvi*). When *Horav Avraham Yitzchak Zimmerman, zl*, was called to become *Rav* of *Kremenchuk* (Central Ukraine), his son-in-law, *Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl* (*Bircas Shmuel*), was asked to fill his position in *Halusk*. His appointment did not sit well with the members of the *chassidic* community who preferred one of their own, a *Rebbe* who had *chassidic* leanings. *Rav Baruch Ber* might have been one of the most brilliant Torah minds in Europe, but he was not *chassidic*. While they respected his

knowledge and piety, they insisted that one of their own guide them. Therefore, they hired their own *Rav*.

The city of Halusk now had two *rabbanim*, a situation that caused the lay leaders of the community some angst. As a result, tensions in the community reached tinderbox level. The *parnesai ha'ir*, lay leaders of the community, had commissioned *Rav Baruch Ber*, and, as a result, were prepared to enter the fray and create a serious controversy over this. *Rav Baruch Ber* turned to his supporters and declared, "My *Rebbe* instructed me to accept the *rabbanus*, rabbinic position. He did not instruct me to enter into a *machlokes*, dispute, over it."

Rav Baruch Ber understood and acted upon his *Rebbe's* words verbatim. If his *Rebbe* would have acquiesced to his entering into a dispute over the position, he would have said so. He did not. Thus, *Rav Baruch Ber* said he would rather leave than quarrel.

The *Brisker Rav* was an individual who not only lived and served Hashem in a precise manner, but he also trained his family and students to act likewise. It was not an issue of *chumra*, stringency. It was about executing Hashem's command precisely, to the full letter of the law. The *Brisker Rav* once asked his son to go to the butcher store to see whether an apple was there. His son returned a few minutes later and said, "Yes, an apple is there." The *Brisker Rav* said, "If this is the case, go and bring it to me." His son returned to the butcher, purchased an apple and returned home. A few minutes passed, and the *Brisker Rav* once again asked his son to go to the butcher shop and see whether the shop had an apple. The son returned to the shop and then came home to inform his father that, indeed, the shop had an apple. The *Rav* told him to return and purchase the apple.

A student who had been observing the scene remarked, "I now understand the level of *Kibbud Av*, honoring a father, that one should achieve. First, the *Brisker Rav* asked his son to see – not to buy. Had he wanted him to purchase an apple the first time he went to the store, he would have said so. He did not. Afterwards, he instructed his son to purchase an apple – which he did. He went through the same ritual a second time. This was the *Rav's* way of training his son to a) listen, and b) follow instructions in accordance with the tone, vernacular and manner that they were given.

The legacy of Brisk is not about being *machmir*, looking for opportunities to act stringently. Brisk is about being *medakdek*, precise, to fulfill the *halachah* to perfection. This is not *chumra*, this is performing *halachah* correctly.

In memory of our Father and Grandfather - Martin Nisenbaum

נפטר ר"ח ניסן תשל"ג ל מרדכי בן ל אפרים ל'

זוכה לראות דורות עוסקים בתורה ויראת שמים

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Parashat Vayak'hel-Pekudei – **An Upright Torah**

Excerpted from **Rabbi Norman Lamm's** *Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages* — Exodus, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Publishers, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern

An Upright Torah* The focus of significance in any synagogue is the ark containing the Torah. That this is so we learn, according to Maimonides, from a verse in this morning's sidra. When the building of the Tabernacle was concluded, Moses performed a final act: "vayikah vayiten et ha'eidut el ha'aron," "and he took and he put the testimony into the Ark" (Exodus 40:20). The word "eidut," "testimony," refers to the two stone tablets, the *luhot*, upon which were inscribed the revelation of God. And, Maimonides teaches us at the end of his *Laws of Sefer Torah* (10:10), just as the tablets were placed in the Ark in the Tabernacle, so are we commanded to place the scroll of the Law in the ark in the synagogue:

It is a commandment to designate a special place for a sefer Torah, and to honor it and embellish it even more than one thinks adequate. The words on the Tablets of the Covenant are the same words which we have on our scrolls.

However, this tracing of the institution of the sefer Torah in the aron in the synagogue to the *luhot* in the aron in the Tabernacle presents certain difficulties. One of the commentaries on Maimonides' famous Code, the author of *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, records a question asked of his teacher: If indeed the scrolls in the ark in the synagogue are of the same nature as the tablets in the Ark in the Tabernacle, then why is it that the *luhot* in the Tabernacle were placed in the aron in a prone position, lying down, whereas the sefer Torah that we place in the ark in the synagogue stands upright? If the source is the tablets in the Tabernacle, then why do we not store the scrolls in a synagogue too lying down?

There is compelling logic to this question. In fact, the author of this commentary records a responsum by the famous Rabbi Jacob Tam who said that had he realized this point earlier, when they were building his synagogue, he would have ordered a much broader and wider ark in order that he might have the scrolls lying down rather than standing upright.

Nevertheless, the force of Jewish law and the weight of Jewish custom is against this decision to have the scrolls lying down. In all of our synagogues the sefer Torah is stored upright; indeed, in some Sephardic synagogues the scroll is read while standing on the table. Why, then, do we keep the sefer Torah standing up, unlike the tablets?

A famous Talmudic scholar, Rabbi David Ibn Zimra, known as the *Radbaz*, wrote a responsum on the subject in which he offered three alternative answers. All three are meaningful. They contain or imply insights into the nature of Torah and Judaism that are significant for all times, including our very own.

His first answer is that there is a fundamental difference between the *luhot* and a sefer Torah. The tablets were meant as *eidut*, as a testimony, as symbols; they were not intended for reading. Their very presence was important, but people did not come especially to open the Ark and read the tablets in order to inform themselves of the Law. In contrast, the sefer Torah was meant specifically for reading and for instructing. Hence, the sefer Torah is kept in an upright position, always ready for immediate use.

What we are taught, therefore, is that the Torah must be for us more than a symbol, more than mere *eidut*. It must be a guide, a code for conduct. The very word "Torah" comes from the Hebrew "hora'a" which means guidance, pointing out, instruction.

A symbol is revered; a guide is used and experienced. Because of its very sacredness, a symbol often lies prone. It is remote and is less likely to be involved in the turmoil and bustle of life. It is treated with antiseptic respect. A guide, a "Torah," is of course sacred; but its sanctity is enhanced by its involvement in life with all its complexities and paradoxes, its anxieties and excitements. A Torah, in order to fulfill its holy function, must stand ready – literally, stand! – to be read and applied.

It is this lack of involvement in everyday life that has caused one contemporary Jewish thinker to bemoan what he has felicitously called our American-Jewish "theology of respect." We American Jews are a very respectful people; we do not reject Judaism outright. Instead, we are more delicate. We "respect" it. We have respect for the synagogue – therefore, we keep miles away from it. We respect the rabbi – hence we never consult him as to the judgment of Judaism on significant problems. We respect Almighty God and therefore would never think of troubling Him about the things that really bother us. We respect Judaism and Torah so much that we never think of taking them seriously in the rigors and hardships of our daily existence. But respect alone is something that is offered to a symbol, to the tablets which are merely *eidut*, and which therefore lie prone. They are a symbol – and that is all. It is only when we have transformed the symbol into the scroll, the theology of respect in *Torat Hayyim*, a Torah of life, that our Torah stands upright and ready for use.

This is important for Jewish scholarship in our days as well. Great opportunities are open for scholarship today, the formulation of the attitude of Torah to the great ethical questions of our day. There is a businessman who wants to know the decision of Torah on price collusion, a young man who is interested not only in the morality but also in the ethics of courtship, and a government employee who wants to know how far he may go in accepting unofficial gifts. Halakha can yield such guidance. If we do not know all the answers of Halakha it is because we need scholars to search more diligently and in greater scope and depth than has been done heretofore.

But nevertheless, the greatest majority of the problems that occur to us can, without new halakhic research, be dealt with decisively and lucidly by Torah. Our

Torah is an upright one when we make the decision to consult it in these practical problems. This, indeed, is the difference between an ideal and a principle: An ideal is an abstraction to which we offer our gesture of respect. A principle is that which governs our very real conduct. The *luchot* are symbols or ideals; the *sefer Torah* is a principle or guide. We have no dearth of ideals; we are sorely lacking in committing our lives to relevant principles. If our Torah is to be a Torah, it must be upright, ready to use.

The second solution offered by Radbaz is to make the following distinction between the tablets and the scrolls of the Law. According to tradition (Shabbat 104a), the engraving on the stone tablets went through the tablets from side to side. Nevertheless, a miracle occurred and these tablets could be read equally well from either side. In other words, despite the fact that the engraving went through and through, you were able to read the message on the stone tablets according to the normal Hebrew system, from right to left, no matter which side you approached them from. Whereas the *sefer Torah* was written only on one side, on the parchment. Therefore, the tablets could be placed lying down, for no matter how you laid them down, you could read them from the side you approached them. But the *sefer Torah* had to stand with its face, upon which was written the text of the Torah, facing the congregation, so that it might always be ready for immediate reading and consultation and study.

There was a time in Jewish life when Judaism was such that it could be approached from any point of view. In a total Jewish environment, even a semi-literate could be a good Jew. Where one's milieu was fully saturated with Jewish feeling and Jewish life, study and scholarship were not quite crucial. One could be unlearned and still sense the presence of God, the *Shekhina*. At the very least, one could benefit from the *shekhuna*, from the very Jewishness of one's neighborhood and surroundings. However, in a society depleted of Jewishness, in a milieu emptied of Jewish feeling and life, Jewishness can be acquired only by study and by scholarship.

We do not live in a total Jewish environment. Our surroundings are secularized and often antagonistic to the goals of Judaism. Therefore, for us, Jewish scholarship, Jewish education, Jewish study, are not only paramount, but indeed the only way to acquire Judaism in the full sense of the word. It is our only guarantee of survival. It is interesting that when, two or three generations ago, very wealthy and philanthropic Jews founded our great philanthropic organizations, they acted according to the noblest precepts of Judaism. It goes without saying that charity, *tzedaka*, is an all-important *mitzva* in our faith. Yet these people, who gave and worked so much for charity, who love their people so, completely neglected the study of Torah. And, tragically enough, today these founders of our Federation do not have one single Jewish survivor left! For indeed, Judaism without *tzedaka* is unthinkable, but Judaism without the study of Torah is impossible.

It is only recently that the day-school movement has won the approbation of larger sections of American Jewry. And not only Jewish studies for children, but also adult Jewish education has begun to show improvement. Only this week statistics were gathered that indicate that American Jews spend annually in the vicinity of \$3 million on adult education. Of course, there is a question as to the results, the extent of its work, the methods employed. But, nonetheless, it is encouraging news that we have finally come to understand the importance of a *sefer Torah* which stands ready to be read and studied and researched. For that is why our scrolls are placed in a standing position: to teach us the need for immediate reference and education.

The third answer provided by Radbaz is a rather daring idea. The synagogue, unlike the Tabernacle, was meant to be primarily a House of Prayer, not one of revelation and sacrifice. Therefore, since the worshippers come to the synagogue and stand facing the ark, the *sefer Torah* must stand when it faces the worshippers.

In a sense, this summarizes the other two reasons advanced by Radbaz. The *sefer Torah* stands because the worshippers stand. What a beautiful idea! There is a mutual and reciprocal honor exchanged by the Torah and its admirers. The Torah itself rises before the *mitpallelim* who take her seriously, who involve her in their daily life, and who study her assiduously.

We are told in the first book of Samuel that God says, "For I will honor those who honor Me, and those who neglect Me shall be disgraced" (2:30). God honors those who honor Him! The Torah stands out of respect before the worshipper!

One of the great and seminal thinkers of Hasidism, the renowned Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, has expressed this idea in yet another way. The Torah as the

revelation of God, and indeed even as an aspect of God Himself, is filled with holiness and divine light. It contains sublime, heavenly illumination. When the student of Torah studies it sincerely and selflessly, without any thought of personal gain, what he accomplishes is the broadening of the absorptive capacity of Torah for this divine light. He adds to Torah's luster and brilliance. Whereas, if he studies it for selfish and unworthy reasons, the lights of Torah are dimmed and its brilliance diminished.

What a bold idea! The fate of Torah depends upon us. The sanctity of Torah is not a constant – its *kedusha* varies with the sincerity and application of the Jew who studies Torah. If we honor Torah, it honors us by being more sacred. And, Heaven forbid, if we neglect Torah, it contains less illumination and sanctity with which to bless our own lives.

That the destiny of Torah depends upon us we often see in unpleasant ways. Too often we discover that Judaism is reviled because of the personal conduct of individual Jews who are apparently committed to Torah, but who act in a manner that is unbecoming, unattractive, and unethical. A thousand years ago, the great Gaon, Saadia, at the end of his introduction to his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, offers eight reasons, all of them psychologically potent, as to why people reject God and Torah. One of them applies to our case: a man notices the obnoxious behavior of a Jew who believes in God, and he therefore rejects not only this inconsistent Jew, but also all that he professes, i.e. God and His Torah. It happens so often in our own experience. Let an Orthodox Jew misbehave, and people blame Orthodoxy rather than the individual. It is unfortunate, it is illogical, it ignores the weaknesses of all human beings no matter what their ultimate commitments, but – it is a fact. And, it places upon us a heavy, yet marvelous, responsibility. This very fact, whether we like it or not, reminds us that each of us possesses great risks and tremendous opportunities. We can, each of us, by our actions, influence the destiny of Judaism. We can, by our attitude and approach, either diminish or enhance the luster of the light contained within Torah. If we are *omedim*, if we stand, then the *sefer Torah* too is *omed*. If we stand upright, then Torah stands upright. Heaven forbid, if we lie down on our God-given duties, then Torah falls because of us.

This then is the significance of the position of the Torah in the ark. It is upright because it must be ready for use as a guiding principle in our lives. It is upright because it must be studied and its message plumbed. It is upright because it stands in respect and honor of those who so use it and thereby enhance its own holiness and illumination.

Torah must never lie in state. It must stand in readiness. The Jew must never sink low; he must soar even higher – and thereby contribute to the sublimity of Torah. For as Maimonides put it in the passage we quoted in the very beginning, it is a *mitzva* to honor and glorify and embellish the Torah even more than we can. For if we will not strive to be more than merely respectful Jews, we will become less than respectful Jews. If we do not aspire to become more than human, we are in danger of becoming less than human.

The times we live in, the circumstances that surround us, and our ancient and hoary tradition all call out to us to stand up and live as upright Jews, and so keep our Torah in the ark upright as well. *March 6, 1965