

## Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shabbos Parshas Veyeitzeh 5776

### Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein *The Irrelevance Of It All*

In attempting to be currently relevant, in the long view of history and human events, is the danger of becoming totally irrelevant. This occurs when dealing with transient issues, when a long-term view is what is really necessary. By reading and listening to the media, the bloggers, and the party and convention planners among us, one would believe that the fate of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, the salvation of Torah Judaism and the general welfare of humankind is dependent on empowering women rabbis or excluding them, destroying or preserving an illegally built synagogue building and giving pat answers to very complex and complicated personal and family problems and issues.

All of these issues have an importance in their own right but none of them, in the long run, are relevant to Jewish survival in a general sense. Women rabbis have been around for decades in the non-Orthodox synagogue world. Has their presence strengthened any of these faltering and failing groups?

Is there any evidence whatsoever that women rabbis strengthened Jewish commitment among the unaffiliated? Is there any reason, except for the empowerment of a few diehard women, to think that this issue should be at the forefront of Jewish life and rabbinic savants?

It is completely irrelevant to the current situation of Jews and Judaism in the world. It will not convince the unfortunately alienated Jew to become more Jewishly committed and it will certainly not resonate with the vast majority of Orthodox Jews. So why pursue something that is so unnecessarily divisive and essentially useless? Why, indeed?!

Europe declared that it was going to label Israeli products grown, produced, or manufactured east of the "green line" as being from occupied territory. This is Europe's contribution to achieving peace in the Middle East. The response of the Moslem extremists, who Israel has to deal with on a daily basis, to this gesture of European solidarity, was the horrendous massacre of innocents this past weekend in Paris.

The labeling issue now appears as it should be, to be absurd, useless and completely irrelevant to the realities of the Middle East and the Moslem world. By now it should be evident even to the most obtuse Israel-basher that the problem is not the "settlements" but rather a militant Islam that refuses the right of others to exist in the Middle East..... and now, for that matter even in the USA and Europe.

Of course Europe, its media and academia, has a long history of dwelling on the irrelevant. It is trapped in its own tangled web of moral equivalency where good is evil and evil is good. Orwell's 1984 is Europe 2015. Anti-Semitism knows no logical boundaries or sensible argument or debate. And make no mistake about it, today's anti-Israel rhetoric, demonstrations and actions are motivated by anti-Semitism. This curse has haunted Europe for millennia and it is still thriving there today. Labeling products is completely irrelevant to the future of Israel and of Europe. But Moslem migration and Moslem extremism and terrorism are the stuff of Europe's future. Europe should stop whistling past the graveyard.

The current tense situation in Israel – Jerusalem is still far safer than New York, Chicago or Paris – again points out the irrelevance of two-state solutions. Without a change in the Palestinian mindset, which disavows Israel's right to exist, all the diplomatic efforts at peace are doomed to failure. All of the proposals for bridging the gap are completely irrelevant to the realities of the situation.

President Obama himself realized this to be the situation when he stated that no real progress can be expected during the remainder of his term in office. There is a begrudging admittance in that statement – inferred but certainly not explicit – that not everything is the fault of Benjamin Netanyahu's obstinacy.

Of course, the Israeli Left, which itself is rapidly becoming more and more irrelevant in much of Israel's society, will never admit its errors or basically change its tune and policies. But the result of becoming irrelevant is that eventually people stop listening. Irrelevance only breeds continuing and more intensified irrelevance. Thus we will have to wait and see what events will occur in the future that will change the present situation and give us an opportunity to truly bridge the gaps and create a more stable and even peaceful Middle East.

Shabbat shalom

### Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein *Vayetzei*

Rashi comments regarding the opening word of this week's Torah reading that when a righteous person departs from a community, the loss is noticeable and is damaging to that community. In most instances, the community or even the righteous person's own family and friends, pay little attention to his or her presence while the person is amongst them. It is only when that person is no longer with them, does their true value and mettle become apparent. And then it is usually a case of too little, too late. Yaakov is a low profile person in his community. It is Eisav who makes the headlines, gives the interviews and media appearances. He is the outside man while Yaakov is quiet, studious, private and not obtrusive. But communities, especially in the Jewish world, are built upon the righteousness.....the quiet Yaakovs and not on the bombast of noisy Eisavs.

I have often commented that the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed totally not because of the millions of evildoers who were their inhabitants but rather because there were not ten righteous and good people who lived in their community.

Judaism values and prizes the worth of a single individual. It never deals with numbers and majorities alone. It strives to create righteous individuals by whose mere presence alone societies are enhanced and the influence of good prevails. It is therefore sad that the value of such good people is noticed most significantly only by their departure and absence.

When Yaakov arrives at the house of Lavan, Lavan is financially impoverished. He is forced to use his daughters as his shepherds – a shameful matter in his place and time. Yaakov's presence in Lavan's home over the next decades will cause him to become rich and powerful. In a rare moment of candor, Lavan admits to Yaakov "that the Lord has blessed me because of you."

All of history indicates the blessings that have occurred to countries, empires and civilizations simply because the Jewish people resided in their midst. Nevertheless, this realization does not prevent anti-Semitism and violence against Jews from being justified and encouraged. Lavan is the perfect paradigm for this warped behavior. He knows that his success is a result of Yaakov's presence in his home and yet he pursues Yaakov and hopes to somehow destroy him.

This paradoxical type of mindset is abundantly and clearly visible in our current world. We are cursed by others not for our actions but simply because we have the temerity to exist. Good people were not allowed to live in Sodom. Jews are not to be allowed in the Land of Israel.

The influence of good is an intolerable idea in a world committed to evil and falsehood. Yet, Spain, Portugal and Poland want the Jews to come back. Europe wants to be free of Jews but somehow to retain the presence and benefits of Jews living in its midst. It is a warped and complicated world that we live in. Like Yaakov, there is little that we can do about it except to continue to soldier on.

Shabat shalom

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeitzei**  
For the week ending 21 November 2015 / 9 Kislev 5776  
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)  
**Insights**

### **Holy Eclipse!**

**“And Yaakov left Be’er Sheva and went to Charan.” (21:10)**

Most of us get to a certain platform of spirituality in life and leave it at that. We’re happy to move into neutral and coast on what we’ve already achieved.

If we decided to keep Shabbat, we carry on keeping Shabbat; if we said, “I’m going to keep kosher,” we carry on keeping Kosher, or putting on tefillin or whatever it is. If we went to Yeshiva, we carry on learning — sometimes less, sometimes more. At some point we feel, “Okay, I’m not that great, but I’m not that bad either.”

Truth be told, to move outside our comfort zone and do something that’s even a little bit more than other people is very difficult. It’s difficult because people don’t do more than they have to. Some of us struggle to do even that. In terms of spirituality we are a bit like herd animals. We like to stick with the crowd.

And we also tend to think, “What difference does it make to the world anyway? True, I’ll be a better person, but there are already so many tzadikim (righteous people) in the world, so what does the world need me for? Why do I need to be so religious? Aren’t there already enough “Famous Tzadik” pictures to put up in the succa?”

“And Yaakov left Be’er Sheva and went to Charan.”

Rashi explains that the Torah needed to write only that Yaakov went to Charan — what need was there to emphasize that he also left Be’er Sheva? He answers that when a tzadik leaves a place it leaves an impression. When a tzadik is in a city, his presence causes radiance and a luminous, spiritual brilliance to settle on the city, and when he leaves, the radiance is lost.

The question arises, “Was Yaakov the first tzadik to leave a city? Didn’t both his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham both leave places? Why does the Torah emphasize Yaakov’s leaving over theirs?”

The difference is that when both Avraham and Yitzchak left places, they left no tzadik of their stature behind, whereas when Yaakov left Be’er Sheva he left his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka, two great tzadikim. One might have thought that since Yitzchak and Rivka remained, Yaakov’s departure would not dim the spiritual light of the place. Therefore, it is specifically here that the Torah emphasizes the reverse — holiness never eclipses itself. The spiritual light that three holy people radiate is much greater than two.

When we think that our meager efforts at being close to Gd are eclipsed by the great and the holy people of our generation, we should remember that holiness is never eclipsed, that our every holy thought or action adds immeasurably to the cosmos.

Sources: Kli Yakar in Talelei Orot

© 2015 Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

---

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

**Rabbi Weinreb’s Parsha Column Vayetzei**

### **“Tears”**

Many years ago, when I was studying for my doctorate in psychology, we had a number of fairly strict requirements in addition to our courses in psychology. For example, we were expected to possess a reading knowledge of two foreign languages, and Hebrew was then not one of them. We were also required to study statistics and to take several courses in what was called “the biological bases of behavior.” These courses were designed to provide us would-be experts on the “mind” with some understanding of the workings of the “body.”

The instructor was a specialist in human physiology who only lectured sporadically. Instead, he had each of us choose a topic of interest to us, research it thoroughly, and present our findings to the class. I still remember some of the topics I selected. One was the physiology of sleep,

and another, the effects of physical exercise on emotions. Perhaps I’ll find a way to weave one of those topics into a future column on the parsha. But this week, I’ll refer instead to a third topic I selected; a talk I gave about tears. If I recall correctly, I entitled the talk ““Shedding Tears: A Uniquely Human Behavior.””

It amazed me at how little was known about tears back then. In preparation for this column, I had a brief “consultation” with Google and discovered that not much more is known about the subject today than was known back in my graduate school days.

What we do know is summarized in the simple dictionary definition: “A tear is a drop of the clear salty liquid that is secreted by the lachrymal gland of the eye to lubricate the surface between the eyeball and the eyelid to wash away irritants.” We still know little about the physiological explanations for the correlation between tears and mood improvement, and questions as to why women shed tears more easily than men are still largely unresolved.

We are on solid ground when we explain why onions stimulate tears, or why our noses run when we cry. We remain in the dark when we attempt to understand the significance of the fact that crying for emotional reasons seems to be unique to humans. Crocodiles shed tears, but not because they are emotionally upset or aesthetically inspired.

At this point, I am sure that the reader has begun to wonder about the connection of my abiding and consuming interest in the phenomenon of human tears to this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Vayetzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3). Let me assure you, dear reader, that there is a connection, and it is to these remarkable verses: “Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes; and Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.”

Many find it curious that the Bible accentuates Rachel’s physical beauty. There is, however, ample precedent for that. Her predecessors Rebecca and Sarah are both described as exceedingly beautiful.

But why is Leah’s physical appearance denigrated? Why do we need to be told that her eyes were weak, soft, and tender? Is this facial feature of Leah’s a virtue or a blemish? And if it is the latter, why mention it?

Rashi helps us answer these questions. He comments, “Leah supposed that she was destined to marry Esau, hence she shed tears. She heard people say that Rebecca had two sons and Laban two daughters. Surely, the older daughter will marry the older son, and the younger daughter the younger son.” This prediction, this assumption that she was destined to spend her life with the wicked Esau, troubled her greatly, and she cried and cried until her tears disfigured her beautiful face.

Chassidic masters have interpreted this seemingly superficial difference between Rachel’s pristine beauty and Leah’s imperfect appearance as symbolic of two types of moral heroines. Rachel represents the perfect tzaddeket who encounters no challenges to her moral perfection. Leah, on the other hand, exemplifies the person who overcomes obstacles and experiences setbacks in her struggle to achieve the status of tzaddeket. Leah’s tears are the tears of a ba’alat teshuvah, one who has known disappointment and failure in her progress toward perfection and whose tears are an essential component of her moral triumph.

This view of tears as part and parcel of the struggle of the searching soul is found time and time again in King David’s Book of Psalms. Thus, in psalm 42, we read: “Like a hind crying for water, my soul cries for You, O God...my tears have been my food day and night; I am ever taunted with, “Where is your God?””

And in psalm 56, we learn that not only do tears comprise the experience of the spiritual seeker, but that the Almighty keeps track of tears, cherishing them and preserving them: “You keep count of my wanderings; You put my tears into Your flask; into Your record.”

Finally, the Book of Psalms teaches us that tears shed in the interest of drawing closer to God not only are eventually effective, but that those tears are transformed into songs of joy. Thus, we have become familiar with the phrase in the Shir HaMaalot, or Song of Ascents, psalm 126, which reads: “They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.”

Leah’s weak eyes are not a physical defect. Her tears are emblems of her moral strivings. Her tears are not signs of weakness or cowardice; quite the

contrary, they encompass her strength of character, and we would be well advised to learn from Leah how and when to cry.

It was about the time that I presented that paper on the physiology of tears in graduate school that I first read and appreciated what has since become one of my favorite novels, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. I favor it for many reasons, one being that in this novel, Dickens portrays a Jew as a kind, compassionate, and heroic figure. But I also admire the following quotation from the novel, one that I have copied down for reference in my work as both a psychotherapist and spiritual guide:

"Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears...I was better after I had cried, than before—more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle."

I could easily conclude this essay with the above quotation from this great British novelist, one of the keenest observers of the human condition. But I choose instead to conclude with this Talmudic teaching, found in Tractate Berakhot 32b:

"Rabbi Elazar also said: Since the day the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer were locked, as it is said: 'Though I plead and call out, He shuts out my prayer.' (Lamentations 3:80) Yet, despite the fact that the gates of prayer were locked, the gates of tears were never locked, as it is stated: 'Hear my prayer, Lord, and give ear to my pleading, keep not silence at my tears.' (Psalms 39:13)"

---

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

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

***How the Light Gets In***

Why Jacob? That is the question we find ourselves asking repeatedly as we read the narratives of Genesis. Jacob is not what Noah was: righteous, perfect in his generations, one who walked with God. He did not, like Abraham, leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house in response to a Divine call. He did not, like Isaac, offer himself up as a sacrifice. Nor did he have the burning sense of justice and willingness to intervene that we see in the vignettes of Moses' early life. Yet we are defined for all time as the descendants of Jacob, the children of Israel. Hence the force of the question: Why Jacob?

The answer, it seems to me, is intimated in the beginning of this week's parsha. Jacob was in the middle of a journey from one danger to another. He had left home because Esau had vowed to kill him when Isaac died. He was about to enter the household of his uncle Laban, which would itself present other dangers. Far from home, alone, he was at a point of maximum vulnerability. The sun set. Night fell. Jacob lay down to sleep, and then saw this majestic vision:

He dreamed and, look, there was a ladder set on the earth, with its top reaching heaven; and, look, angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And, look, the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread forth to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you and through your offspring. And look, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Gen. 28:12-17)

Note the fourfold "and look," in Hebrew *ve-hinei*, an expression of surprise. Nothing has prepared Jacob for this encounter, a point emphasized in his own words when he says, "the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it." The very verb used at the beginning of the passage, "He came upon a place," in Hebrew *vayifga ba-makom*, also means an unexpected encounter. Later, in rabbinic Hebrew, the word *ha-Makom*, "the Place," came to mean "God." Hence in a poetic way the phrase *vayifga ba-makom* could be read as, "Jacob happened on, had an unexpected encounter with, God."

Add to this Jacob's night-time wrestling match with the angel in next week's parsha and we have an answer to our question. Jacob is the man who has his deepest spiritual experiences alone, at night, in the face of danger and far from home. He is the man who meets God when he least expects to, when his mind is on other things, when he is in a state of fear and possibly on the brink of despair. Jacob is the man who, in liminal space, in the middle of the journey, discovers that "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!"

Jacob thus became the father of the people who had their closest encounter with God in what Moses was later to describe as "the howling wasteland of a wilderness" (Deut. 32:10). Uniquely, Jews survived a whole series of exiles, and though at first they said, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" they discovered that the Shekhinah, the Divine presence, was still with them. Though they had lost everything else, they had not lost contact with God. They could still discover that "the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!"

Abraham gave Jews the courage to challenge the idols of the age. Isaac gave them the capacity for self-sacrifice. Moses taught them to be passionate fighters for justice. But Jacob gave them the knowledge that precisely when you feel most alone, God is still with you, giving you the courage to hope and the strength to dream.

The man who gave the most profound poetic expression to this was undoubtedly David in the book of Psalms. Time and again he calls to God from the heart of darkness, afflicted, alone, pained, afraid:

Save me, O God, for the floodwaters are up to my neck. Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire; I can't find a foothold. I am in deep water, and the floods overwhelm me. (Ps 69:2-3)

From the depths, O Lord, I call for your help. (Ps. 130:1)

Sometimes our deepest spiritual experiences come when we least expect them, when we are closest to despair. It is then that the masks we wear are stripped away. We are at our point of maximum vulnerability – and it is when we are most fully open to God that God is most fully open to us. "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps.34:18). "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise"(Ps. 51:17). God "heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3).

Rav Nahman of Bratslav used to say; "A person needs to cry to his Father in heaven with a powerful voice from the depths of his heart. Then God will listen to his voice and turn to his cry. And it may be that from this act itself, all doubts and obstacles that are keeping him back from true service of Hashem will fall from him and be completely nullified." [1]

We find God not only in holy or familiar places but also in the midst of a journey, alone at night. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me." The most profound of all spiritual experiences, the base of all others, is the knowledge that we are not alone. God is holding us by the hand, sheltering us, lifting us when we fall, forgiving us when we fail, healing the wounds in our soul through the power of His love.

My late father of blessed memory was not a learned Jew. He did not have the chance to become one. He came to Britain as a child and a refugee. He had to leave school young, and besides, the possibilities of Jewish education in those days were limited. Merely surviving took up most of the family's time. But I saw him walk tall as a Jew, unafraid, even defiant at times, because when he prayed or read the Psalms he felt intensely that God was with him. That simple faith gave him immense dignity and strength of mind.

That was his heritage from Jacob, as it is ours. Though we may fall, we fall into the arms of God. Though others may lose faith in us, and though we may even lose faith in ourselves, God never loses faith in us. And though we may feel utterly alone, we are not. God is there, beside us, within us, urging us to stand and move on, for there is a task to do that we have not yet done and that we were created to fulfil. A singer of our time wrote, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." The broken heart lets in the light of God, and becomes the gate of heaven.

[1] *Likkutei Maharar* 2:46.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

---

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

**Rabbi Ari Kahn on Parsha**

***Climbing Jacob's Ladder***

On the run from a furious brother who is plotting his demise, Yaakov finally falls to the ground in exhaustion and allows himself to sleep. His mind still racing, he wonders how the situation has spun so far out of control. Only yesterday, things had seemed perfect, even idyllic; only yesterday, he had been part of a family, but today tears and screams drown out all civil communication. They had managed to get along, despite their differences; but now – chaos. He had been put in an impossible situation. Should he respect his mother or his father? No child should ever be forced to make such a choice. There was no easy, clear solution: Obeying his mother meant deceiving his father. Honoring his father meant defying his mother. And then there was the matter of his brother, who wanted him dead.

And all this, over some blessings. Were they really worth this drama? Were they worth dying for? Moreover, who was to say that ill-gotten blessings would ‘work’? This was not some magical spell that merely needed to be uttered in order to bring about the desired result; this was a prayer, meant to open the very heavens and bring about Divine aid and abundance. Could blessings attained surreptitiously bring about such results? What if God did not agree with his mother, and the stolen blessings would prove worthless?

As Yaakov drifted off to sleep (or, perhaps, not really sleep), he floated into an alternative consciousness. A new reality swept over him; he had an epiphany. All at once, everything he saw was holy, beautiful, awe-inspiring. The heavens opened, and he saw the “entrance,” a ladder reaching up to heaven, with angels climbing up and down. Yaakov’s first reaction might well have been relief, even joy: God had not rejected him because of his behavior. Quite the opposite: He was granted revelation. As his eyes followed the ladder up toward heaven, he saw a glimpse of images that were so holy, they were beyond imagination.

And then, Yaakov heard a voice he had never heard before – yet the sound was strangely familiar and unmistakable: God spoke to him, introduced Himself, and promised him great things: First, that the land he was lying on would one day be his. Second, God assured him that he would have many children who would burst forth in every direction, and, third, that God would protect him. And then, the voice was still.

If we consider this revelation, first in terms of the implication that God had chosen Yaakov, and additionally in terms of the blessings that make up the content of the revelation, we might expect Yaakov to have reacted with unqualified, unmitigated joy. And yet, Yaakov’s response was far more circumspect; his words reflect a certain dread or fear behind the awe he expressed. Apparently, the content of God’s communication gave Yaakov cause for worry, not because of what He said, but because of what He did not say. Something was missing, and recent events make it clear what Yaakov had hoped to hear but did not.

Yitzchak had given Yaakov two separate sets of blessings: One set were blessings that had always been intended for him. As he sent him away to begin his journey, Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, knowing precisely whom he was, with the “blessings given to Avraham.” The Promised Land and a great nation of descendants to inherit it. This blessing was echoed in the promises Yaakov had just been given by God Himself. On the other hand, the blessing he acquired by dressing up as his brother Esav, the blessing he had taken surreptitiously, the blessing that was so important to his mother, promised physical bounty, abundance and power. When God spoke to Yaakov, He was silent regarding this blessing – and that silence was deafening; Yaakov heard it loud and clear. The blessings for great wealth were not repeated; apparently, they were not in his future.

When Yaakov awakes, he makes declarations and promises: He will build a house for God, and if God gives him the smallest modicum of physical security – clothes on his back, bread on his plate – he will, in turn, give one tenth back to the Almighty. Suddenly, for Yaakov, the blessings he had gone to such great lengths to acquire are no longer important. The physical world that had seemed so critically important pales in contrast with the sublime vision he has just been shown. Yaakov suddenly understands that he can be content to live his life with only a bare minimum of physical wealth – and he vows to dedicate even that minimal wealth to God. Yaakov sees the ladder, with its feet on the ground and its head in heaven, and he draws a remarkable conclusion: He himself can be like that ladder. He can live simultaneously in the physical and spiritual worlds. He can bridge the gap, and live his life as a quest to achieve spirituality and holiness, continually climbing up the ladder from earth to heaven. At that moment, he vows to devote his physical resources to his quest for holiness, and to climb that ladder just as he saw the angels do.

With this realization, Yaakov can continue on his journey. Only when he understands that wealth and power are not the true blessing is he able to travel forth and to succeed. Now that he fully understands the true nature and significance of the blessings he received from his father, he becomes worthy of the blessings his mother instructed him to acquire. The physical bounty with which he was blessed becomes a tool in the service of the greater blessings of spirituality and holiness. Wealth is not the real gift; rather, true blessing is born of figuring out how to take the physical stuff God gives us and use it to construct our own ladder to heaven. A blessed life is one spent climbing the ladder and transforming physical bounty into spiritual wealth.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.com/2015/11/audio-and-essays-parashat-vayetze.html>

---

**Drasha Parshas Vayeitzei**

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

***Brothers in Scorn***

Yaakov's first encounter with his future wife Rachel was significant, encompassing varied emotions, each of which merits lengthy discussion. Upon greeting her at a well, Yaakov feeds her sheep, kisses her, cries, and then identifies himself as the brother of her father. (Genesis 29:11-12)

Such classification needs explanation. Yaakov was not a brother of Rachel's father Lavan: he was a nephew, the son of Lavan's sister, Rivka.

Why, then, did Yaakov refer to himself as a brother of Lavan? The Talmud in Megilah explains that Lavan's notorious reputation preceded him. He was nicknamed Lavan HaArami, or Lavan the charlatan. He was known not only to be avaricious, but to be unscrupulous as well. Yaakov wanted to lay the ground rules with his future bride.

"If your father will act conniving then I am his brother [meaning, I will act conniving as well]. However, if he will act honorably I will respond in kind."

What needs clarification, however, is why begin a marital relationship on such a note. What precedent is Yaakov setting with such a powerful declaration?

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933) was a leader of Polish Jewry in the years before World War II. In addition to being the chief Rabbi of Lublin, building and maintaining one of the world's largest and most beautiful yeshivos, Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he was also one of the first Orthodox members of the Polish parliament, the Sejm. He was a courageous leader whose vision and unwavering commitment to Torah values gained him the respect of Jews and gentiles alike.

During his first weeks as the leader of the Orthodox Jewish delegation, Rabbi Shapiro was approached by a Polish parliamentary deputy, Professor Lutoslawski, a known anti-Semite whose devious legislation constantly deprived minorities of their civil and economic rights.

Standing in front of a group parliamentarians in the halls of the Sejm, the depraved deputy began. "Rabbi," he shouted, a sly smile spreading across his evil face. "I have a wonderful new way for Jews to make a living -- they can skin dead dogs."

Without missing a beat Rabbi Shapiro shot back. "Impossible, their representatives would never allow it."

The Professor looked puzzled. "Whose representatives? The Jews'?"

"No," smiled Rav Meir, "the dogs' deputies."

Flustered, the vicious bigot tried one more. "Well, my dear Rabbi," he continued sarcastically. "Do you know that on the entrance gate of the city of Schlesien there is an inscription, 'to Jews and dogs entrance forbidden?'" Rabbi Meir just shrugged his shoulders. "If so, I guess we will never be able to visit that city together."

Needless to say, nary an anti-Semitic word was ever pointed in Rabbi Meir's direction again.

Yaakov knew that to initiate his destiny in the confines of a hostile environment he should proclaim the rules loud and clear. He would not allow himself to be swayed, duped, or connived by even the master of deception and ridicule, Lavan the charlatan. In forging the household that would be the basis for Jewish pride and eternity, Yaakov had to make it clear to his future bride that he too could play hardball. He sent a message of pride and awareness to his descendants. Though this Jew who sat in the tent would enter his new environment with brotherly love, if he needed to, he could just as well be a brother in scorn.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

Torah.org

---

### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeitzei**

#### ***A Unique Application Of The Law Of Keifel [Paying Back Double]***

After Leah gave birth to her sixth son, the pasuk says, "And afterwards she had a daughter (v'Achar yalda bas) and she called her name Dinah." [Bereshis 30:21] The expression "v'Achar" [and afterwards] is a bit ambiguous. Exactly what is the point of reference about which the Torah remarks "And afterwards"?

The Talmud [Brochos 60a] explains: After Leah rendered judgment upon herself. She knew based on prophetic knowledge that Yaakov was destined to father 12 tribes. She calculated that she already had given birth to six sons and the handmaidens (Bilhah and Zilpah) each had given birth to two sons, raising the total to ten sons. "If this too will be a male, my sister Rochel will not even have the status of one of the handmaidens (in terms of a being a matriarch of the future tribes of Israel)." Therefore, Leah prayed and the male child she was carrying turned into a female.

The Talmud elaborates that there was actually an in utero transfer. At the time, Rochel was pregnant with a female and Leah was pregnant with a male. When Leah prayed that her sister should have at least as many sons as Bilhah or Zilpah, the two fetuses somehow miraculously switched places. In the end, Leah wound up with six sons and Rochel wound up with two sons. On this basis, Leah named her daughter Dinah, indicating that she made a Din [judgment] upon herself to beseech that the child she was carrying be turned into a girl.

There is a quip people say: "No good deed goes unpunished." That may be the cynical quip of the masses, but in the Almighty's system of Justice, no good deed goes unrewarded. Rav Shimshon Pinchus has an interesting observation on the parsha. Leah, who as we see from the beginning of the parsha, was extremely bent and keen on having as many sons as she could, gave up a son that was literally already hers. Look at the loss she accepted upon herself – she gave up the opportunity to mother another one of the Tribes of Israel!

Chazal say that this Dinah, who was violated in next week's parsha by Shechem, had a daughter through that incident. The Medrash says that this daughter married Yosef. Yosef had two sons – Ephraim and Menashe, who were counted as two tribes in the Jewish nation. Therefore, Leah did not lose a tribe by giving up her son for a daughter. It emerges that because of this act, Leah became the great-grandmother of two additional tribes. In effect, she was compensated two for one, for the loss she voluntarily accepted upon herself.

Rav Shimon Pinchus says the Halacha is that if a thief steals, he must pay back double. If when someone does something wrong the punishment is double, it logically follows that if someone does something right the reward should certainly be double.

#### ***A Blessing For The Exile: Your Children Should Be Like The Dirt Of The Ground***

Parshas Vayeitzei contains another example of the motif that appears throughout Sefer Bereshis – the idea of "Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim" [the actions of the patriarchs foreshadow those of their descendants]. Sefer Bereshis is the "peek behind the curtain" to see what is going to unfold later in Jewish history.

Yaakov has the famous dream of the ladder based on the ground with its top reaching towards Heaven. The Angels of G-d were ascending and descending the ladder. There are different interpretations as to the symbolism of this dream. The Ramban quotes a Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer, which provides a completely different explanation of this dream. (When doing a computer search for this Medrash, I actually found it in Medrash Tanchuma rather than in our version of Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer.)

The Medrash interprets that the Angels on the ladder represent the ministering officers of the Gentile nations. The vision Yaakov beheld, according to the Medrash, represented the four exiles that Klal Yisrael endured following the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash.

Yaakov Avinu saw a vision of the Officer of Bavel [Babylonia] ascending 70 steps up the ladder and then falling down. Next, he saw the Officer of Persia and Media ascend the ladder 52 steps and then fall down. Subsequently, he saw the Officer of Yavan [Greece] go up 100 steps and then descend.

This matches Jewish history. After Nevuchadnezer destroyed the Beis HaMikdash, we endured the Babylonian Exile for 70 years. Then, as was the case with all world powers, Bavel ceased to be a player on the world stage. Yaakov saw that. After Bavel was removed from the world stage, the Empire of Persia and Media came to power, but they also eventually faltered. Greece, too, (alluding to the persecution during the Chanukah story) ascended and fell.

Finally, Yaakov saw the Officer of Edom – the Roman Empire that destroyed the second Beis HaMikdash. With Edom, Yaakov saw something frightening. The Angel ascended higher and higher such that Yaakov could not even count how many steps he ascended. In Yaakov's vision, the Officer of Edom never descended. At that moment, a fear took hold of Yaakov and he said, "Lest this one has no descent". Perhaps this means that the Roman Exile (Galus Edom), the exile that we are presently experiencing, will last forever!

However, Hashem told Yaakov, "Fear not, my servant Yaakov; tremble not, Israel" [Yirmiyahu 46:27]. "Even if you see him climb up to Me, as it were, from there I will cause him to fall". Do not worry. No matter how high he may climb and no matter how long it may last, at the end of the day, the Almighty will remain on top and bring him down. "If you will elevate your nest like an eagle and if you will place your nest among the stars, from there I will bring it down, declares Hashem." [Ovadia 1:4]

After Yaakov sees this frightening vision, the Almighty tells him, "And your seed will be like the dust of the earth." [Bereshis 28:14] What kind of consolation promise was this? Yaakov was likely thinking, "My grandfather, Avraham, heard that his children would be like the stars in Heaven [Bereshis 22:17]. That was a beautiful bracha. Even the bracha to Avraham that his children would be "as numerous as the sand of the seashore" is beautiful imagery." However, the bracha that "your seed will be like the dust of the earth," especially in the context of such a frightening vision, does not seem like it accomplishes the purpose of putting Yaakov's mind at ease.

The answer is, "Yes, that is a Bracha". Avraham Avinu lived at a time of "the Stars of the Heaven". Klal Yisrael was at its apex. He foreshadowed (Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim) the days of Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] when Jerusalem was the envy of the entire planet and everybody came to Eretz Yisrael and to Yerushalayim to see the wisdom of Shlomo. That era was symbolized by the life of Avraham (described as 'a prince of G-d in our midst' [Bereshis 23:6]). However, Yaakov was the patriarch

who foreshadowed Galus [Exile]. He was about to endure something in the next decades of his life by Lavan that would set the stage for what his children would endure in Galus. Hashem gave him the bracha that was appropriate for Exile – and your children will be like the dust of the earth. The dirt of the ground is something that can never be destroyed. It can be trampled on; it can be run over by many nations with their mighty armies. But the dirt is always there. This is the blessing that Yaakov needed to hear after being shown the vision of the Four Kingdoms in general and the Kingdom of Edom [Rome] in particular. The descendants of Yaakov will be trampled on and they will be abused. There will be pogroms and they will be executed. These are all things that Galus Edom has given us; but at the end of the day, "Your seed will be like the dust of the earth" – indestructible. The dirt always has the last laugh. At the end of the day, the 'afar' (dirt) remains on top.

Tosfos comments [Brochos 17a] on the expression, "let my soul be like dust to everyone" (in the prayer we recite at the conclusion of Shmoneh Esrei: "My L-rd, guard my tongue from evil..."). Tosfos interprets "just as the dust is there forever and is never destroyed, so too may it be Your Will that my children never be destroyed, as it is written, 'And your seed will be like the dust of the earth.'" Our prayer to the Almighty at the end of the Amidah is that our children and grandchildren should last forever and never be destroyed.

"And you should be like the dust of the earth" may not be the best blessing in the world for people who are in control but for us who have had to endure these last 2000 years of exile, it is the greatest blessing and the greatest guarantee!

#### ***The Blessing Of Dispersion***

Then G-d adds something else to his bracha to Yaakov: "And you will spread out (u'faratzta) to the west, to the east, northward, and southward" [Bereshis 28:14]. During the Babylonian Exile, Jews were concentrated in Bavel. During Galus Yavan, there was a community centered in Eretz Yisrael under the Syrian-Greeks. However, there is something unique about Galus Edom – Jews are all over the world. "U'faratzta Yama v'Kedma, Tzafona, v'Negba" is the bracha of this Exile. No matter where one goes, he will always find Jews.

It is the most amazing thing. In the most "G-d forsaken" places on the planet, there are Jews. Recently, I received an e-mail from a woman in Harare, Zimbabwe who listens to my tapes! That is literally the middle of nowhere! Not long ago, I received a letter from a Jew in Big Sky, Montana. Then he moved from Big Sky, Montana to Ocean Shores, Washington. Neither place has a lot of minyanim. This is "spreading east and west..." Not only will we be there: U'Faratzta – we are going to explode. We are going to make an impact.

When you look at the history of Jewish people, wherever they went – whether it was Spain or whether it was Morocco, across the entire planet – the Jews were not just passive. It was U'Faratzta – they exploded; they made an impact. This is the promise that the Almighty gave to the Patriarch Yaakov.

Do not worry that it looks like Galus Edom will never end. You will be like the dust of the earth that can never be destroyed. Your children will be spread out, and make an impact wherever they go. Then one day, "even though your dispersed are spread out to the ends of the Heaven, from there the L-rd, your G-d, will gather you and from there He will take you in" [Devarim 30:4].

This is what we are waiting for. Just as the rest of the bracha to Yaakov has come true, so too we will see "from there He will take us in" come true as well, with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, Amen.

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

RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

---

**The TorahWeb Foundation**  
**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**  
***Ein Mazal L'Yisroel***

In his dream Yaakov Avinu saw angels going up the ladder that led to heaven and coming down again. The medrash offers various interpretations of this image. One of the understandings presented by the medrash is that the angels going up and down represented the historical rise and fall of various nations, with the angels representing the sar of those various nations.

The medrash continues to explain that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yaakov Avinu, "now it is your turn to climb up the ladder to represent the success of the Jewish people." Yaakov was afraid to do so, for the angels of all the other nations ultimately went down again, representing the fall of all those nations, and he didn't want the Jewish people to fall. Whereupon Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yaakov not to fear; "I will be with you. I will hold your hand. The Jewish people will not disappear."

The entire existence of the Jewish people from its very outset was not natural. According to tradition, the avos and imahos were akorim; b'derech hateva none of us should exist. This is the simple meaning of the Talmudic statement (Shabbos 156), "ein mazal l'Yisroel." According to the Ramban, "mazal" is a reference to the natural rules of history. Jewish history is not subject to any of those rules. In Yaakov's fight with the malach, the malach succeeded in injuring Yaakov's leg, but Yaakov won the fight. The malach represents the laws of nature (as the Talmud tells us that every blade of grass has a malach causing it to grow) and Yaakov's victory over the malach represents the principle that Klal Yisroel is l'ma'alah min hateva.

If one were to draw a graph representing the history of any other nation or culture, the graph would go up, reach a peak, and then do gawn, representing the rise and fall of that nation. But if one were to graph the history of the Jewish people, the graph would zigzag, i.e. have many alternating peaks and valleys. When we observe the mitzvot we rise, and when we sin we fall.

The navi (Malachi 3:6) tells us that just as Hashem is above teva, and therefore not subject to change, so too Bnai Yisroel are also above teva and will not disappear.

Copyright © 2015 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

---

#### **The Jerusalem Post**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

***Parshat Vayetze – What To Say And How To Say It***  
***November 19, 2015 Thursday 7 Kislev 5776***

*"In this deep pain, Rachel erred in her words to Jacob and said a sentence that was both mistaken and perhaps even dangerous."*

In this week's portion, we read a sad story, perhaps the saddest one in the Torah. This is the story of Jacob and his two wives – Rachel and Leah. Why did Jacob marry these two sisters? The Torah describes the development of this story in detail. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel. He loved her and was prepared to work for seven years to earn the right of living by her side.

But Rachel had an older sister, Leah, and a tricky scoundrel of a father, Laban.

After seven years of labor, when it was time for Jacob and Rachel to consummate their love, Laban the swindler decided to give Leah to Jacob in place of Rachel. Under cover of darkness, since in those days homes were not lit at night, Jacob mistakenly married Leah. It was only in the morning that he discovered what had been done to him, and at that point it was too late.

Jacob decided that he was not giving up on his love for Rachel and that he would marry her as well. With incredible nerve, his cheating father-in-law demanded that he work another seven years to get Rachel, and Jacob did so and married Rachel.

When a story begins like that, we can only imagine what kind of home this will be and what the results will be of a forced marriage to Leah alongside Jacob's burning love for Rachel.

And if that wasn't enough, the Torah tells us that Leah gives birth to a boy, and then to another, while Rachel is barren, watching her older sister raise

a whole tribe of children. Leah gave birth to four boys and a girl while Rachel was still unable to bear children.

Are there words to describe Rachel's pain and suffering? At this point we get to the part of the story that does not need words to describe further because it cannot be read without feeling deep sorrow. This is the conversation between Jacob and Rachel: "And Rachel saw that she had not borne [any children] to Jacob, and Rachel envied her sister, and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, and if not, I am dead.' And Jacob became angry with Rachel, and he said, 'Am I instead of God, Who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'" Genesis 30, 1-2) We still remember Jacob and Rachel's love. He worked for his father-in-law for 14 years to win Rachel, and now where have we gotten to? Our sages expressed this clearly when they described God's rebuke of Jacob: "And the Holy One Blessed be He said to him: And is that how you answer someone in distress?" (Bereishit Raba 71, 7).

Why, indeed, did Jacob react that way to Rachel's words? Rachel was suffering. Of this there is no doubt. Her jealousy of her sister was so burning that she herself said that she had lost any will to live if she could not bear children. But in this deep pain, Rachel erred in her words to Jacob and said a sentence that was both mistaken and perhaps even dangerous. She turned to Jacob and demanded: "Give me children." But could Jacob give her children? He loved her, and would surely do anything in his power to help her. What was behind this unusual demand? The answer to this question lies in understanding the situation. If we think that Rachel turned to Jacob as a loving and beloved husband, we are mistaken. Here, Rachel turned to Jacob as a righteous man, as a man who has the power – so Rachel thought – to change reality and help her in extraordinary ways. Her words now sound completely different. She is not pouring her heart out to Jacob her husband, but rather is searching for salvation from Jacob the righteous.

This is why Jacob responds so harshly: "Am I instead of God?" – If you think that any man has the power to give you children, then you are sorely mistaken! There is only one address for this, and that is God. He is the only one who can help, and He is the only one you should lean on. A righteous person can bless and pray, but cannot give you children! Jacob was obviously correct in his words but God rebuked him anyway. Even if the content of his words was true, he should have taken into consideration that he is standing before a woman who is in pain, in agony, whose jealousy and distress are overwhelming.

One must never speak harshly to a person in such a state. Jacob should have corrected Rachel, but not in that way. If Rachel erred in "what" she said, Jacob failed in "how" he said it.

Even when speaking the truth, one must know how to say it.  
Shabbat shalom!

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.

---

## The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

### *Vayetze: Mark of the Righteous*

November 19, 2015

*We shape our dwellings, and afterwards our dwellings shape us. — Sir Winston Churchill*

There is a principle in biblical studies that the Torah does not include extraneous words. This leads to a famous question as to why the Torah needs to mention that Jacob is departing the city of Beer Sheva (Genesis 28:10), when we already know from previous verses where he's leaving from. The popular answer that is given is that just as a city feels the effect of the arrival of a righteous man, so too they feel the departure of the righteous.

The Sfat Emet writing in 5636 (1876) was not satisfied with the popular answer. He felt that there is a deeper answer to the redundancy of mentioning Jacob's city of departure. He explained that the effect of the righteous upon the city is so strong that it leaves a mark even after they have departed and that it becomes a source of merit to the city to have had the righteous living in their midst.

He further compared the effect the righteous have upon a city like that of the performance of commandments upon the body. Whenever a person performs a commandment with their body it leaves a mark of holiness upon their limbs which remains even after the commandment has been performed and serves as a merit to the body.

May we perform commandments with all of our selves and merit health and holiness for our entire body.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication

For the Jewish community of Paysandu on the inauguration of its building and its wonderful hosting. May they have many more visits and successful community events.

In memory of my friend and neighbor, Yaakov Don h"yd, murdered by Muslim terrorists in Gush Etzion.

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is the Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of two books of Biblical Fiction and over 400 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes*  
*The Blogs | The Times of Israel*

---

## Rav Kook List

### Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

#### *Psalms 94: Fortunate Misfortune*

**אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּךְ אֱשֶׁר-תִּיַסְרֵנִי י-ה, וְנִמְתַּוְרְתִּיךָ תִּלְמַדְנִי. תְּהִלִּים 94:12**

**"Fortunate is the one whom You, God, afflict. You teach him from Your Torah." (Psalms 94:12)**

What a peculiar statement! Why did King David think that troubles and afflictions are so wonderful?

And what exactly is the connection between suffering and Torah study?

#### Suffering and Torah

The Talmudic sages discussed at length the phenomenon of suffering in the world. While they wrestled with the theological challenges of this subject, they were equally concerned with the more practical question of how one should respond to suffering.

"If a person sees that he is subject to afflictions, he should examine his conduct... If he has examined his actions and found no wrongdoing, then he should attribute his suffering to bitul Torah - neglect of Torah study. As it says, "Fortunate is the person whom You, God, afflict; You teach him from Your Torah."

"And if one finds that he is not guilty of neglecting Torah study, then these afflictions must be 'Afflictions of Love.' As it says, ה' יוכיח - "God rebukes those whom He loves" (Proverbs 3:12)." (Berachot 5a)

In other words, the Talmud interprets the verse as associating afflictions with, not Torah study, but rather its neglect. Still, one may ask: of all the numerous human faults and foibles in the world, why should bitul Torah be a likely cause for heavenly-ordained suffering?

#### Bitul Torah for the Common Man

While bitul Torah is a serious transgression, there is no expectation that the entire nation will be constantly immersed in Torah study. Scholars are expected to devote themselves to Torah study; but the average person is not required to maintain such levels of dedication. It is understood that people will spend time earning a livelihood, and even acquire possessions beyond their bare necessities. Such activities are not considered bitul Torah.

What does bitul Torah mean for the regular person?

We are all born with character flaws which we are expected to correct. Ideally, we should refine our personality traits through Torah. As we engage in Torah study, we are exposed to its values and ideals. If one succeeds in internalizing its teachings, one strengthens positive traits such as integrity, sensitivity, and compassion.

The nature and degree of Torah study that is expected from each of us is a function of the flaws that we need to correct. This is the meaning of bitul Torah for non-scholars. Those who fail to invest the necessary time and effort to refine themselves through Torah study are guilty of neglecting Torah.

Now we can better understand the connection between afflictions and bitul Torah. Suffering refines and humbles. It heightens one's sensitivity to the needs of others, and increases awareness of one's own limitations. One who fails to correct his personality traits through Torah study may very well find himself undergoing the less pleasant refinement that comes from suffering.

#### Afflictions of Love

The Sages recognized that there are no pat formulas to explain all forms of suffering in this world. There may be completely righteous individuals who are innocent of all misconduct - including bitul Torah - and still they endure troubles and suffering. Therefore, the Sages introduced an additional factor called 'Afflictions of Love.' These afflictions are not a form of punishment; nor do they come to correct some fault on the part of sufferer. Rather, they are an expression of Divine love. But what kind of love is this?

There are some aspects of character refinement that cannot be attained by any other means. Not by individual effort, not by good deeds, not even by Torah study. The only means to ennoble the spirit and attain a higher ethical perfection is through 'Afflictions of Love' - a gift granted by God that enables one to attain a spiritual level above and beyond one's own natural capabilities.

It is this concept of 'Afflictions of Love' which sheds light on the psalmist's assertion: "Fortunate is the person whom You, God, afflict."

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 15-16)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: [mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com](mailto:mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com)

---

#### Rabbi Nachman Kahana

#### BS"D - Parashat Va'yaitzai 5776

#### The Big Atonement Is Soon To Occur

Learning Torah has a myriad of benefits, not least of which is that one who has wide access to the writings of Chazal will never be taken by surprise by anything which occurs in human experience.

An angel informs Hagar of the impending birth of a son (Beraishiet 16,12):

וְהוּא יְהִיָּה פְּרָא אָדָם יָדוּ בְכָל יוֹד כָּל בּוֹ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל אֲדָוִי יִשְׁכֵּן

He will be an uncontrollable man;  
his hand will be against everyone  
and everyone's hand against him,  
and he will live in hostility  
toward all his brothers."

I have frequently quoted the Zohar at the end of parashat Va'aira in Shmot. The Zohar informs us that in the future the wild, uncontrollable Yishmael will cause three great wars: one on the sea, another on land and the third in the vicinity (could be 1000 kilometers away) of Yerushalayim.

The prophet Yechezkel in chapter 32 maps out the "war to end all wars", when in the future the Christian nations of Europe will go to war with the spiritual descendants of Yishmael. In any case, the Jews in Eretz Yisrael will survive and thrive.

The cancer of Islam has spread to Paris. It will soon raise its murderous head in London, New York and Washington. It is in Africa, in Asia, in South America and even in Australia. "His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him", as HaShem's angel informed Hagar.

The future is now here.

Humanity has crawled and stumbled for nearly six thousand years; a thousand years for every one of the six days of creation which Adam and Chava impaired, tarnished, blemished and desecrated. And the big atonement is soon to occur.

#### Hashem's invitations repeatedly rejected by His people

The Jewish nation is discredited with four dramatic historical refusals; each one causing dire consequences for the nation.

1) The day of freedom was determined by HaShem to be the 15th of Nisan. Millions of Am Yisrael would leave Egypt, terminating 210 years of debilitating slavery, to become the Creator's chosen nation. However, 80% of the people refused to venture into the treacherous desert and died during the weeklong plague of darkness.

*An invitation by HaShem had been rejected by a majority of the people.*

2) When Rechav'am, son of King Solomon, ascended the throne, Yeravam ben Navat led the northern tribes in seceding from the united kingdom of David and Shlomo. In order to solidify the secession, Yeravam created a surrogate Bet Hamikdash in the cities of Bet El and Dan, and prohibited the people of the north from going up to Yerushalayim.

The Mishna in Tractate Ta'anit states that the 15th of Av was one of the two happiest days in the Jewish calendar, with the other being Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Gemara explains that on this day, Hoshea ben Ela, the last king of the ten northern tribes, rescinded the 200-year-old prohibition enacted by Yeravam ben Navat, and permitted the people of the northern tribes to go up to Yerushalayim.

If Hoshea was such a great man, asks Rav Kahana in the Yerushalmi Ta'anit, why during his reign was Shalmanetzer, King of Assyria, permitted to conquer and exile all the Jews of the northern tribes whose whereabouts are not known to this day?

The Talmud answers that Hoshea ben Ela opened the way to Yerushalayim – BUT NO ONE CAME. Hoshea ben Ela was personally held accountable for not imposing his authority by forcing people to renew their covenant with the holy city and for the sin of the people not reuniting with Yerushalayim.

*Another invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.*

3) On the 2nd of November, 1917 a letter was sent from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. It begins:

"His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object..."

The British permitted unlimited immigration until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the number of Jews who came was 1806; in 1923 it rose to 8175; and from the Balfour Declaration until 1939, the number of olim was less than 300,000. By then, the Holocaust descended upon the Jewish people.

*Yet another invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.*

4) In 1967, HaShem invited Am Yisrael to return home. In the aftermath of our miraculous military victories, HaShem restored Yerushalayim, Yehuda, Shomron and the Golan to Jewish sovereignty. There should have been a mass aliyah of one million Jews to settle these lands. However, the number of olim was a heart rending dismal number.

*Once again, an invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.*

The result of the last rejection is a devastating holocaust – not one of bloodshed, because the Jewish nation could not bear another Shoah. This holocaust is one of assimilation where over 70% of non-orthodox Jews in the U.S. and other parts of the world are marrying gentiles.

As profound as the essence of Judaism is, it can be stated succinctly as follows: HaShem chose the Jewish nation and commanded us to perform His mitzvot IN Eretz Yisrael.

Any deviation from this formula is a perversion of the Torah.

In this parasha, our father Ya'akov experienced two dreams. In the first, Ya'akov sees HaShem's angels ascending to heaven and descending to this world. In the second, he sees how he can increase the number of animals in his herd.

The enormous difference between the dreams is that the first one with ascending and descending angels occurred when Ya'akov was in Eretz Yisrael; but while in chutz la'aretz even the great Ya'akov dreamt of animals and wealth.

#### You will serve, but in which army?

Many people will claim that it will never happen. But in view of the challenges Islam has placed before the free world, the US will have no choice but to put boots on the ground in Syria and Iraq.

The US army is already spread too thin. In the very near future the US President will have no choice but to reinstate the draft. When that happens your sons and daughters will be inducted into the army.

Now one might guess that I am suggesting aliyah to Eretz Yisrael as an alternative. But what kind of a solution is that? For here too, one must serve in the army. True! But what a difference it makes when your

commander was a yeshiva student who doesn't shave during the sefirah period; who understands that the regulation time of half an hour for shacharit is not enough; who makes sure that what you eat is kosher; who will not let you violate the Shabbat unless it is halachically required.

Your flab will turn into muscle. The ground you march on while you get calloused feet are the hills of Yehuda and Shomron, as did your forefathers thousands of years ago in the defense of Eretz Ha'kodesh.

Now it might be argued that there is always the 4D escape route which exempts divinity students from military service. But I would think that if the next war will be perceived as a religious war between Islam and the Western world's religions, it would be reasonable to assume that the ones who would be drafted first would be those who are religiously orientated. In which case, being a Yeshiva student would make one more eligible for service.

A member in my beit kneset told me about his first day in the US army, in 1957. The first night before going to sleep, the sergeant called out to all the men, "Be very careful with your personal belongings. For all you know you might be sleeping next to a Jew."

I recall a poem we learned in high school. It described two soldiers in the First World War who were shooting at each other. One was a soldier in the German army and the other a soldier in the Russian army — both were Jews. The stanzas alternate from the thoughts of one soldier to the other. The German Jew asks Hashem why do I have to serve the Kaiser, and the Russian Jew asks Hashem why do I have to serve the Czar.

Both take careful aim, shoot and mortally wound the other. With their waning strength, they both crawl out to meet the man who is taking away the other's life. When they were very close one says, "She'ma Yisrael." The other says, "Hashem E'lo'kei'nu." And then gripping each other's arms both call out, "Hashem e'chad".

The clock is ticking. Send your children to Israel. If you fail to do so they will never forgive you!

So tonight, go into your sons' and daughters' bedrooms and look at them sleeping so peacefully.

Don't forget to pull up the blankets. You wouldn't want them to catch cold.

Shabbat Shalom

See more at: <http://nachmankahana.com/vayaitzai-5776/#sthash.D1dSETYO.dpuf>

Rabbi Nachman Kahana is an Orthodox Rabbinic Scholar, Rav of Chazon Yechezkel Synagogue – Young Israel of the Old City of Jerusalem, Founder and Director of the Center for Kohanim, and Author of the 14-volume "Mei Menuchot" series on Tosefot, "With All Your Might: The Torah of Eretz Yisrael in the Weekly Parashah", as well as weekly parasha commentary available where he blogs at <http://NachmanKahana.com>

© Arutz Sheva, All Rights Reserved

---

## ***Uva Letziyon, a Precious Prayer*** **By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

*Chazal tell us that Yaakov's davening was the introduction of tefilas Maariv, which sometimes includes Uva Letziyon. I therefore introduce:*

**Question #1:** Why does the *kedusha* that we recite in *Uva Letziyon* include an Aramaic translation?

**Question #2:** Why does the *Uva Letziyon kedusha* quote a different *pasuk*, *Hashem yimloch le'olam va'ed*, instead of the third *pasuk* that we usually say for *kedusha*, *Yimloch Hashem le'olam Elokayich tzion ledor vador halelukah*?

**Question #3:** If I am delayed in beginning the second *Ashrei* of the morning prayers, should I *daven* in order, or should I recite *Uva Letziyon* together with the *tzibur* and recite *Ashrei* later?

### **Answer:**

The greatest thing man can accomplish in life is to praise *Hashem*, and, indeed, all of our *mitzvos* and all of our studying Torah are different ways whereby we demonstrate homage to *Hashem* and fulfill His will. In

addition, we actively praise *Hashem* in many places in our prayer, but, most particularly, when we recite *Kaddish* and *Kedusha*. The precious prayer *Uva Letziyon*, recited most frequently towards the end of the daily *Shacharis*, includes the *Kedusha* referred to as the *Kedusha Desidra*.

The importance of this prayer is manifest in the following incredible passage of *Gemara*:

*Now that the Beis Hamikdash has been destroyed, with what merit does the world exist? The Kedusha Desidra and the Yehei Shmei Rabba recited after the weekly sermon (Sotah 49a with Rashi).*

What is the special merit of these two prayers that gives them the ability to sustain the entire world? Both of these prayers involve two highly important *mitzvos* – studying Torah and praising *Hashem* – and both are performed by the entire community (*Rashi ad loc.*). It is presumably for this reason that the *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 132:1)* emphasizes that one must be very careful to recite the *Kedusha* of *Uva Letziyon* with proper concentration. Furthermore, it is prohibited to leave *shul* until these passages are recited (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 132:2*).

Why are these two *mitzvos* special? Through Torah study we understand a glimmer of the brilliant blueprint with which *Hashem* created the world. At the same time, reciting *Kedusha* and *Kaddish* is our praise in *Hashem's* honor. By combining these two concepts, sanctifying *Hashem's* name and studying His Torah, we literally maintain the world's existence!

*Rashi (Sotah 49a)* explains that the *Kedusha Desidra* was established so that every Jew be involved in studying Torah each day, since the prayer includes passages that are immediately translated. Being recited both by scholarly Jews and unlettered ones is precisely the reason for its great worth.

### ***Kedusha***

The words of the *Kedusha* parallel the exalted, sublime praise recited by the angels. We recite *Kedusha* itself three times in three different forms during weekday *Shacharis*. The main *Kedusha* that we recite during the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei* consists essentially of three praises, first the words beginning with *Kodosh, Kodosh, Kodosh*, from the book of *Yeshayahu (6:3)*, then the sentence *Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo* from the book of *Yechezkel (3:12)*, and then the words beginning with *Yimloch*, which are from *Tehillim (146:10)*. The first two of these verses, *Kodosh* and *Baruch*, are the actual descriptions of the Prophets witnessing the angels praise *Hashem*.

Although when we recite *Kedusha* we are describing, or perhaps even mimicking, how the angels praise *Hashem*, the angels must wait for us, the Jews, to praise *Hashem*, so that they may begin their praise (*Chullin 91b*). Singing *Hashem's* praises in this fashion demonstrates not only our ability to rise to the plane of the angels, but actually expresses our ability to supersede their level.

For this reason, we recite the main *Kedusha* standing, with our feet together like angels (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 125:2*). We lift our bodies by tiptoeing at the beginning of the reciting of each of the three verses (*Shla*). Furthermore, one should look heavenward while reciting *Kedusha (Rama)*, and some authorities rule that one should keep one's eyes closed (*Taz*), although this approach is not universally accepted (*Mishnah Berurah 125:6*).

One should be careful to recite the *Kedusha* together with the *tzibur*, not earlier and not later (*Mishnah Berurah 125:3*). We rule that as long as one begins reciting each sentence while the *tzibur* is still reciting it, one is considered to have recited it together with the *tzibur (Elyah Rabbah, cited by Bi'ur Halachah)*.

### **Why Three Kedushos?**

Why do we recite the *Kedusha* a total of three times during our *Shacharis*? Would not one recital be sufficient?

The first *Kedusha* that we recite daily is an integral part of the long, first *brochah* of what we call the *birchos kerias shma* -- the *brochos* that accompany the recital of the morning *shma*.

Above, I mentioned the *Gemara's* statement that the world exists in the merit of the *Kedusha Desidra*. The main focus is that every Jew should participate in the daily recital of *Kedusha* as part of the *tzibur*. At the time that this prayer was initiated, many of the less learned individuals who

attended daily morning services were not concerned about arriving on time, and, consequently, missed the earlier *kedushos*. So that these Jews not be deprived of the merit of reciting *Kedusha* together with the community, *Chazal* instituted this prayer, *Uva Letziyon* (*Avudraham*).

### Redemption before *Kedusha*

The main focus of this article is on the third *Kedusha* and the prayer that surrounds it, whose words begin *Uva Letziyon*. The beginning of the *Uva Letziyon* prayer introduces the *Kedusha Desidra* by reciting three verses. Why do these verses precede the *Kedusha Desidra*? The opening two are consecutive verses from the book of *Yeshayahu*, the first of which promises the future redemption, and the second of which refers to the covenant of the Torah.

We are about to complete our morning daily prayers, with which we hope to establish the “Torah-ness” of our day, and now we are embarking on our daily struggle for financial survival. Immediately prior to beginning this effort, we should be reminded that there will be a future redemption in which we are assured participation, provided that we maintain cognizance of our responsibility to *Hashem* (*Hirsch*).

The second verse begins with the words, *va'ani zos berisi osam amar Hashem...*

*Hashem* says: “As for Me, this treaty I have made with them.” However, as *Rav Hirsch* notes, the verse should then say *va'ani zos berisi itam*, with them, an indirect object, and not *osam*, which is a direct object. The word *osam* implies that the treaty is not simply **with** the Jews, but that the Jews are the object of the treaty – the **bris is the very essence** of what the Jews are — we exist because we are *Hashem*’s People. Thus, the second verse reminds us that our *raison d’être* is to be *Hashem*’s People, and that this sensitivity should remain with us as we begin the day’s mundane activities and throughout the ensuing day.

The third verse, which reads *ve'ato kodosh yosheiv tehilos Yisroel*, is from *Tehillim* (22:4), and means that *Hashem* awaits the praises of the Jewish People (*Avudraham*). As I mentioned before, the angels must wait until the Jews begin saying the *Kedusha* before they may begin their praises. The Jewish People are the sole bearers of the recognition of *Hashem* for all of Mankind (*Hirsch*). Thus, this verse is an obvious lead into our *shira* to *Hashem*.

### Closing of *Uva Letziyon*

After we recite the *Kedusha*, we recite a verse from *Divrei Hayamim* to verbalize the request that the recital of *Kedusha* bring us closer to *Hashem* and repair our hearts. We then include prayers for Divine assistance in learning to fear *Hashem*.

This last request raises a question: How can we ask *Hashem* to help us fear Him? After all, everything is in G-d’s hands **except** for the fear of G-d, which is in our hands. Thus, this is the one item that we should *not* ask from *Hashem*, but should assume responsibility for, ourselves!

The answer is that we ask *Hashem* for His assistance in our learning to fear Him – we start on the road and request His help in continuing (*Avudraham*). As the *Midrash* states, “*Hashem* said to Israel: ‘My sons, merely open for me an opening for *teshuvah* as large as the eye of a needle, and I will expand for you openings wide enough for wagons to drive through’” (*Shir Hashirim Rabba* 5:2).

### Why Aramaic?

With this background to the prayer, we can now begin exploring the answers to our opening questions. The first question was: Why does this *Kedusha* include an Aramaic translation?

At the time that this prayer was established, the familiar language spoken by Jews was Aramaic, and some of the common people did not understand Hebrew. For this reason, several other parts of our liturgy specifically intended for everyone’s comprehension were also written in Aramaic. The most common instance of this is the *Kaddish* (see *Tosafos, Brochos* 3a s.v. *Ve'onin*), but note, also, *ha lachma anya* in the *Pesach Seder*, which includes a personal invitation to any Jew to join the *Seder*, and the *kohen’s* question to the father of a firstborn at a *pidyon haben, mai ba’is tefei*. With the same goal in mind, at the time of the *Gemara* each verse read during the *kerias haTorah* was immediately followed by the *Targum* translation, an observance that we no longer follow, since the average person no longer

understands Aramaic. A vestige of this practice remains when we recite the *Akdamus* praise on *Shavuot* as part of the *kerias haTorah*. (By the way, some Yemenite communities still follow this practice of reciting the *Targum* after each *pasuk* during *kerias haTorah*.)

For the same reason, since the *Kedusha Desidra* was instituted to include the unlettered, it was accompanied by the traditional Aramaic translation, so that everyone who read it would understand it (*Tur; Avudraham*).

It is also important to note that the *Targum* is not simply a translation of the verses, but serves as a commentary. For example, the *Targum* that we recite to the verse *Kodosh, Kodosh, Kodosh*, which is from *Targum Yonasan*, teaches that the repetition of the word *kodosh* is not to show how holy *Hashem* is (three increasing levels of sanctity), but that His Holiness exists in the highest Heavens, in the earth that He created, and forever.

### Why *Yimloch*?

The second question asked above was: Why does the *Kedusha* of *Uva Letziyon* quote a different verse, *Hashem Yimloch Le’olam Va’ed* (*Shemos* 15:18) rather than the verse that we recite for *Kedusha* in the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*? With a bit of an introduction, we will discover that the answer to this second question is also linked to the basic theme of why we recite the *Kedusha Desidra*. Let us first study a related passage of *Gemara*:

*Onkelos the Convert composed the translation of the Torah that he had been taught by Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. Yonasan ben Uziel composed the translation of Nevi'im that he had been taught by Chaggai, Zecharyah and Malachi [the Last Prophets], and the Land of Israel trembled 400 parsah by 400 parsah. A Heavenly voice emerged, declaring, “Who is it that revealed My secrets to mankind?” Yonasan ben Uziel stood up and declared, “It is I who revealed Your secrets to mankind. It is revealed and well-known before You that I did this not for my honor nor for the honor of my father’s household, but only for Your honor – to decrease contention in Israel.”*

*He [Yonasan ben Uziel] also wanted to reveal the translation of the Kesuvim. A Heavenly voice emerged, declaring, “You have done enough!” What is the reason [not to translate the Kesuvim]? Because it contains the End of Days – the arrival of the Moshiach (Megillah 3a). (The translation published on Kesuvim called Targum Yonasan is of unknown, but definitely much later, origin, and was certainly not written by Yonasan ben Uziel. It does not carry the imprimatur of an old, accepted translation.)*

With the background that this *Gemara* provides, I can now explain why the *Kedusha Desidra* includes a different verse to praise *Hashem*’s Kingship. In the *Kedusha* recited during the repetition of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the third verse, beginning with the word *Yimloch*, is from *Tehillim*, which is part of *Kesuvim* and therefore has no traditional *Targum* translation. As mentioned above, the main purpose for reciting *Kedusha Desidra* is to include the entire Jewish population – including even the unlettered, who required an Aramaic translation. Since the sentence beginning with the word *Yimloch* was without a *Targum*, a different verse, *Hashem yimloch le’olam va’ed*, that conveys the same concept, *Hashem*’s Monarchy, is substituted, because it is a *pasuk* in *Chumash* and therefore has a *Targum Onkelos* (*Avudraham*).

### What should we recite aloud?

The fact that this verse is from *Chumash*, whereas the two preceding verses are from the Prophets, became the cause of some interesting practices. The *Avudraham* mentions a custom, rejected by the *halachic* authorities, to recite the entire *Kedusha Desidra* quietly, to avoid calling attention to the fact that *Hashem yimloch le’olam va’ed* is mentioned last, although as a verse from *Chumash*, it has greater sanctity than the two passages from the Prophets. Although the majority of *halachic* authorities rule that all three *Kedusha* verses should be recited aloud (*Mishnah Berurah* 132:4), other sources mention a custom of reciting only the two *pesukim* of *Kodosh* and *Baruch* aloud – but not *Yimloch*, which was recited quietly – again to avoid calling attention to the fact that this verse is not recited until **after** the words of the prophets (*Avudraham*).

### Aramaic out loud

There is a dispute among the authorities as to whether the Aramaic translations may be said audibly. The *Beis Yosef* (*Orach Chayim* 59)

explains that, according to the *Zohar*, these passages are not to be said aloud, and the *Rama* (132:1) also rules this way. However, the authorities quote that the *Arizal* was not concerned about this and interpreted the *Zohar* in a different way. Most communities follow the practice of the *Beis Yosef* and the *Rama* and recite these passages quietly.

#### **Kedusha Desidra with the Tzibur**

At this point, we can address the third question asked above: “If I am delayed in beginning the second *Ashrei*, should I *daven* in order, or recite *Uva Letziyon* together with the *tzibur* and recite *Ashrei* later?”

Since the whole thrust of *Uva Letziyon* is that the angels wait until we collectively sing *shira*, every individual should participate in this recital. Therefore, except for someone who is at a place in the prayer where there should be no interruption, everyone should join for the recital of *Uva Letziyon* and certainly for the refrains. For this reason, the *Magen Avraham* (Introduction to 132) rules that someone who has not yet *davened* and finds himself with a *tzibur* who are ready to recite the *Kedusha Desidra* should join them in their recital (cf., however, *Shaar Hatziyun* 132:3), and certainly that someone who is a bit behind the *tzibur* should skip ahead to recite the *Kedusha Desidra* together with the *tzibur* and recite *Ashrei* afterwards.

We should note that there is a major dispute among the *Rishonim* whether one may recite the *Kedusha Desidra* and the *Kedusha* of the *Birchos Kerias Shma* without a *minyan*. The conclusion of most authorities is that one may recite these two *kedushos* without a *minyan*. However, one should strive to recite them with a *minyan* whenever possible.

#### **On Shabbos and Yom Tov**

On *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, *Uva Letziyon* is not recited in the morning at all. Instead, its recital is postponed to *Mincha*. This is because the late-arriving individuals who were the reason for the *takkanah* of the *Kedusha Desidra* arrived early enough on *Shabbos* to *daven Shacharis* with the *tzibur* and be present for the *Kedusha*. Instead, *Chazal* postponed the recital of *Uva Letziyon* to *Mincha* because there was a weekly *drosha* on *Shabbos* afternoon, attended also by the *amei ha'aretz*, that closed with words of hope about the future redemption, the sanctity of the *Kedusha* and our role in praising *Hashem* – so the *drosha* naturally led into the prayer *Uva Letziyon* (*Avudraham*). Others provide a slightly different reason for postponing *Uva Letziyon* to *Mincha* – since the *Shabbos* morning *davening* is fairly long, *Chazal* postponed *Uva Letziyon* (*Siddur Vilna*, quoting *Orchos Chayim*).

#### **Kedusha at Night**

Aside from the daily dose of *Uva Letziyon*, there are three occasions when we recite this prayer at night. Those three occasions are *Motza'ei Shabbos*, after reading the *Megillah* on Purim, and after reading *Eicha* on *Tisha B'Av*.

#### **Why Motza'ei Shabbos?**

The reason why this prayer is recited on *Motza'ei Shabbos* is because this is when the deceased *evildoers* who now inhabit *gehennom* return there. To ease their plight a bit, we add this prayer, which somewhat delays their return to *gehennom*.

When this prayer is recited at night, the accepted custom is to omit its two opening verses (those from the *Book of Yeshayahu*) and begin with the words *Ve'ata Kodosh*. This is because reciting the words *Uva letziyon goel*, and the redeemer will come to *Tzion*, as a prayer, is inappropriate at night. Recital of these words as a prayer at night implies that we are hiding the salvation and the freedom from bondage that *Hashem* will bring. On the contrary, this redemption will happen in broad daylight.

#### **Why on Purim and Tisha B'Av?**

On Purim night we recite this prayer immediately after completing *Megillas Esther*, expressing the manifestation of *Hashem's* *Kedusha* that resulted from our redemption. We recite this prayer on the night of *Tisha B'Av*, both because it is a special time to pray for the ultimate redemption and because it is a consolation that deliverance will come (see *Abudraham* and *Aruch Hashulchan* 693:1).

#### **Conclusion**

We now understand why the prayer *Uva Letziyon* is so important. Let us all now strive to recite it with the appropriate respect and focus.

---

#### **Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha**

#### **Thanksgiving: Harmless Holiday or Chukos HaGoyim?**

**Rabbi Yehuda Spitz**

*For the week ending 29 November 2014 / 7 Kislev 5775*

One of the interesting aspects of being American and living in the ‘*Medinashel Chessed*’ is dealing with secular holidays. A day off from work, more time to learn, and suspended Alternate Side parking rules are always appreciated. Of these holidays, Thanksgiving is by far the most popular among *Yidden*, with many keeping some semblance of observance, generally as a way of saying ‘Thank You’ and showing a form of *Hakaras HaTov* to our host country. Although all agree that showing *Hakaras HaTov* is prudent, on the other hand, it is well-known that many contemporary *poskim* were very wary of any form of actual Thanksgiving observance. This article sets out to explore the history and halachic issues of this very American holiday.

#### **Why Thanksgiving?**

Americans commonly trace the holiday of Thanksgiving to the 1621 Pilgrim celebration at Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts. The Pilgrims were expressing gratitude to G-d for a successful harvest after surviving a particularly harsh winter; mainly due to the aid of Squanto, the English-speaking Native American, and the Wampanoag tribe, who taught them how to hunt (turkey) and plant (maize) in the New World, and shared food supplies with them. A second Thanksgiving was observed on July 30th, 1623 in appreciation of an abundant harvest after a refreshing 14-day rain following a nearly catastrophic drought. Similar sporadic celebrations occurred locally throughout the New England area for the next century or so, but never on a national level until 1777, during the Revolutionary War, when ‘The First National Proclamation of Thanksgiving’ was given by the Continental Congress.

In 1782, John Hanson, the first United States president under the Articles of Confederation (and mysteriously somehow forgotten from the history books), declared the fourth Thursday of every November was to be observed as Thanksgiving. Several years later, President George Washington issued ‘The First National Thanksgiving Proclamation’ (under the Constitution), designating November 26th 1789, as a day of Thanksgiving. He did so again in 1795. Yet, it was not until 1863, in the midst of the Civil War [a.k.a. The War Between the States or The War of Northern Aggression (for the Southerners out there)], when the holiday as we know it was formally established by President Abraham Lincoln, at the urging and behest of Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady Book*, who was lobbying for a national day off from work. Thanksgiving has since been observed annually as a national holiday across the United States[1]. But our subject is defining how Thanksgiving observance is viewed by Halacha.

#### **Chukos HaGoyim?**

In *Parshas Acharei Mos*[2], we are exhorted not to follow in the ways of the *Goyim*, “*U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu*”. According to the *Rambam* and later codified by the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, this prohibition includes manners of dress, haircuts, and even building styles[3]. *Tosafos*[4] mentions that this prohibition includes two distinct types of customs: idolatrous ones, and those that are nonsensical; implying even if they are not done *l'sheim Avodah Zara*, they would still be assur to practice.

However, the *Ran* and *Maharik*[5] define the prohibition differently. They maintain that a nonsensical custom of the *Goyim* is only prohibited when it is entirely irrational, with no comprehensible reason for it, or when it has connotations of idolatrous intent. Likewise, following a custom that would lead to a gross breach of modesty (*pritzus*) would fit the category. However, observing a simple custom of the *Goyim* that has no reference to *Avodah Zara* would be permitted.

Although the *Vilna Gaon* rejects their understanding of the prohibition, and the *Gilyon Maharsha* seems to follow *Tosafos*[6], nevertheless the *Rema* explicitly rules like the *Maharik* and *Ran*, as does the *Beis Yosef*[7].

Accordingly, they hold that as long as a custom is secular, with no connection to Avodah Zara, such a custom may be observed.[8]

Thanksgiving: Religious or Secular?

But to understand how this affects us and possible Thanksgiving observance, we must first ascertain whether Thanksgiving is truly a religious holiday or a secular one. Of the aforementioned Thanksgiving observances, all were declared as a unique day expressly designated to thank G-d for all of his 'gracious gifts'. This implies that it is meant to be a religious holiday. Yet, only the Continental Congress's proclamation made reference to the Christian deity. Additionally, there is no actual religious service connected with the day at all. Furthermore, nowadays, the vast majority of Americans simply associate Thanksgiving with food (mainly turkey), football, and family, and take the day off. This implies that its observance is strictly secular. Which is the real Thanksgiving?

Contemporary Rulings

As with many issues in halacha there are different approaches to Thanksgiving observance. In fact, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l alone has written four different responsa on topic[9]. Although in the earlier teshuvos he seems to be against the idea of a Thanksgiving celebration (possibly there were more religious connotations involved in the early 1960s celebrations than in the 1980s), nevertheless, in his later teshuvos he does allow a Thanksgiving observance (he notes that it is not a religious celebration) with turkey being served, as long as it is not seen as an obligatory annual celebration[10], but rather as a periodical 'simchas reshus'. All the same, Rav Moshe concludes that it is still preferable not to have a celebration b'davka for Thanksgiving.

Other contemporary poskim who allowed eating turkey on Thanksgiving include Rav Eliezer Silver, Rav Yosef Dov (J.B.) Soloveitchik (the BostonGaon)[11], the Rivevos Efraim, and Rabbi Yehuda Hertzl Henkin[12]. They explain that Thanksgiving is "only a day of thanks and not, Heaven forbid, for idol celebration"; therefore, they maintain that merely eating turkey on Thanksgiving cannot be considered Chukos HaGoyim.

Yet, other contemporary authorities disagree. Rav Yitzchok Hutner[13] is quoted as maintaining that the establishment of Thanksgiving as an annual holiday that is based on the Christian calendar is, at the very least, closely associated with Avodah Zarah and therefore prohibited. He explains that its annual observance classifies it as a 'holiday' and celebrating Gentile holidays is obviously not permitted. It is well-known that Rav Avigdor Miller was a strong proponent of this view as well, as Thanksgiving's origins reveal that it was actually established as a religious holiday.

Similarly, Rav Menashe Klein[14] ruled that it is a prohibited to celebrate Thanksgiving. Aside for citing the Gr"a's opinion, which would prohibit any such celebration, he mentions that although the Thanksgiving holiday was originally established by (Pilgrims) rejoicing over their own survival, that they didn't starve due to their finding the turkey, and might not be considered Chukos HaGoyim, nevertheless there is another prohibition involved. In Yoreh De'ah (148, 7), the Shulchan Aruch, based on a Mishna in Maseches Avodah Zara (8a), rules that if an idolater makes a personal holiday for various reasons (birthday, was let out of jail, etc.) and at that party he thanks his gods, it is prohibited to join in that celebration. Rav Klein posits that the same would apply to Thanksgiving, as it commemorates the original Pilgrim Thanksgiving, thanking G-d for the turkey and their survival, and would be certainly prohibited, and possibly even biblically.

An analogous ruling was given by Rav Dovid Cohen (of Gevul Ya'avetz), and Rav Feivel Cohen (author of the Badei HaShulchan)[15], albeit for different reasons. Rav Feivel Cohen takes a seemingly extreme position, maintaining that not only is it forbidden for a Jew to celebrate Thanksgiving, it is even prohibited for a Gentile to do so as well[16]! Rav Dovid Cohen, on the other hand, writes that for a Jew to eat turkey on Thanksgiving expressly for the sake of the holiday should be prohibited by the rule of Tosafos, as it would be deemed following an irrational rule of theirs that is improper to follow. Yet, he concedes that it is not prohibited for a family to get together on a day off from work and eat turkey together, as long as they do so not to celebrate Thanksgiving, but rather because

they like turkey. Even so, he concludes that it is still preferable not to do so.

Trotting Out the Turkey?

With several differing major approaches to Thanksgiving advanced by contemporary authorities, which is the prevailing custom? Should turkey be on our plates this Thursday? The answer is that it depends. As shown, there are many authorities who maintain that Thanksgiving dinner should be avoided at all costs. However, many people do eat turkey on Thanksgiving, albeit many with non-Thanksgiving-related intent. (Remember, even kosher turkey prices drop for the holiday!) Yet, it certainly seems preferable not to make an 'exclusively for Thanksgiving' party. Everyone should follow his community practice and the lead of their knowledgeable halachic authority.

Anecdotally, my own grandmother, Mrs. Ruth Spitz (May she have a Refuah Sheleimah), would buy a turkey, but instead of serving it for Thanksgiving dinner, would rather save it and serve it l'kavod Shabbos on the Shabbos immediately following Thanksgiving. This way one is not compromising on tradition nor halacha, and additionally receives the benefits of kavod and oneg Shabbos.

Although nowadays for many in Yeshivish and Chassidic circles the idea of observing even some semblance of Thanksgiving may seem an anathema, it is interesting to note that many authorities of the previous generation did not seem overly concerned. In fact, as is widely known, the annual Agudas Yisrael Convention, attended by many Gedolim, was traditionally held over Thanksgiving weekend for many decades, with turkey on the menu[17]! Additionally, Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin's authoritative Ezras Torah calendar (with halachos for the whole year) noted Thanksgiving along with other secular holidays.

Come what may, with Chanuka on the way, we can concentrate on the upcoming eight days of true thanks giving, lehodos u'lehallel. In fact, although there will be no need to be talking turkey while giving thanks, on Chanuka we still all proclaim "Hodu Lashem Ki Tov!"

This article was written L'Iluyn Nishmas the Har Nof Kedoshim, R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Henna Rasha bas Yitta Ratzka, and Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba and l'Zechus for Yaacov Tzvi ben Rivka and Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah!

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

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

[1]However, until 1942, when it was changed by a joint resolution of Congress, Thanksgiving was observed on the last Thursday in November, not the fourth Thursday. (The only practical difference is if there happens to be five Thursdays in November; otherwise, Thanksgiving remains the last Thursday).

[2]Vayikra (Ch.18, verse 3).

[3]Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zara Ch. 11, 1- 3), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 178, 1), based on the Sifra (Parshas Acharei Mos, Parshata 9, Ch. 13, 8).

[4]Tosafos (Avodah Zara 13a s.v. v'ee); answering up the seeming contradiction between the Gemara in Avodah Zara ad loc. and Sanhedrin 52b).

[5]Ran (Avoda Zara 2b s.v. Yisrael), Chiddushei HaRan (Sanhedrin 52b), Shu"t Maharik (Mahar"i Kolon/ Cologne, Shoresh 88, Anaf 1).

[6]Biur HaGr"a (Yoreh Deah 178, end 7) and Gilyon Maharsha (ad loc. 1). The Gr"a is bothered by the fact that the sugya in Sanhedrin seems to imply differently than the views of the Maharik, Ran, and later, the Rema, that a Chok Goyim, even one that is not a Chok Avodah Zara should still be prohibited. Others who ask this question and conclude tzarich iyun on the Maharik's shitta include the Minchas Chinuch (Mitzva 262, 2) and the Maharam Bennet (Divrei HaBris; cited in Shu"t Imrei Aish, Yoreh Deah 55). However, there are those who do resolve the Gra's difficulty, such as the Maharam Shick (Shu"t Yoreh Deah 165). Furthermore, it must be noted that the Seridei Aish (Shu"t old print vol. 3, 93; new print Yoreh Deah 39, Anaf 2) at length proves that the Gr"a's shitta is against the vast majority of Rishonim who conclude that unless there is at least a 'shemetz' of Avodah Zara in their actions, copying them would not be a violation of Chukos HaGoyim. See also Shu"t Bnei Banim (vol. 2, 30) who writes that the minhag ha'olam is to follow the Rema in this dispute, as even according to those who generally follow the Gr"a's psakim, that is only when it is a machlokes Acharonim. Yet, he posits, when the Gr"a argues on both Rishonim and Acharonim, then the normative halacha does not

follow his shitta. However, see Shu"t Mishna Halachos (vol. 10, 116) who does take the Gr"a's opinion into account and seems to side with him (as explained later in this article).

[7]Darchei Moshe and Rema (ad loc. 1). Although he does not cite either side of this machlokes in his Shulchan Aruch, nevertheless, in his Beis Yosef commentary Rav Yosef Karo explains the shitta of the Maharik at great length and does not even cite Tosafos! Although one may infer that the Rambam (and later the Shulchan Aruch who codified his words as halacha) actually meant similar to Tosafos's understanding, as the implications of the prohibition of not copying actions of the Goyim, is seemingly unrelated to actions smacking of idol worship (and that is what the Raavad was arguing on and ruling akin to the Maharik), nonetheless, from the lashon of many other authorities, including the Maharik himself (ibid.), Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzva 262), Mabit (Kiryas Sefer on the Rambam ibid.), Meiri (Sanhedrin 52b), Bach (Yoreh Deah 178), and Divrei Chaim (Shu"t Yoreh Deah vol. 1, 30), it is clear that they understood that the Rambam himself was only referring to actions that had some relation to Avodah Zarah. See Shu"t Seridei Aish (old print vol. 3, 93; new print Yoreh Deah 39, Anaf 1, 5 - 14) who explains this at length. See also Shu"t Melamed L'Hoyeel (O.C. 16) and Minchas Asher (vol. 3, Vayikra, Parshas Emor, 33, ppg. 197 - 205) who discuss the parameters of the prohibition of "U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu" and its nuances at length.

[8]See Minchas Asher (ibid. pg. 200, s.v. u'vdaas) who cites an interesting dispute based on the machlokes between the Rema and the Gr"a. In Hilchos Shavuos (Orach Chaim 494) the Rema records a well known minhag to festoon the shul with grasses as a zeicher to Har Sinai b'shaas Mattan Torah. The Magen Avraham (ad loc. end 5 s.v. nohagin) adds that the minhag is to place trees in shul as well. What is lesser known is that the Chochmas Adam (89, end 1; and in Chayei Adam vol. 2, 131, 13) writes that according to the Gr"a it would be assur to do so; rather it is a blatant violation of "U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu"! Since the Goyim would place a tree in their houses of worship during their holidays, and there is no smach from the Torah to do so on Shavuos, it would be assur according to the Gr"a. Yet, according to the Rema, since we have our own mekor for the minhag, it is not considered Chukos HaGoyim. [See also Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 494, end 6) and Mishna Berura (ad loc. end 10) on this machlokes. Perhaps one can be mechalek in the Gr"a's intent between grass and trees.] A well-known example of this debate is Kehal Adas Yeshurun (KAJ - Breuer's) in Washington Heights, New York, which gets a complete green makeover for Shavuos, including a chupah over the bimah, made entirely out of trees and plants. Trees are also set up near the Aron Kodesh. In setting this up, the congregation is obviously following their Mesoras Ashkenaz, which undoubtedly follows the Rema on this and not the Gr"a. Others, such as Yeshivas Torah V'Daas use flowers and grasses, but not trees.

[9]Shu"t Igros Moshe (Even HaEzer vol. 2, 13; Orach Chaim vol. 5, 20, 6; Yoreh Deah vol. 4, 11, 4; and Yoreh Deah vol. 4, 12).

[10]See also Shu"t Igros Moshe (Yoreh Deah vol. 4, 57, 11) where Rav Moshe reiterates this klal not to add new dates and observances to the calendar. The Chazon Ish as well (Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish vol. 1, 97), and echoed by the Minchas Yitzchak (Shu"t vol. 10, end 10) and Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu"t Yabea Omer vol. 6, Orach Chaim 41, 6), famously wrote very strongly against setting new dates and obligatory observances into our Jewish calendar. A similar sentiment is expressed by Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanagos vol. 2, 721), quoting the Brisker Rav.

[11]Nefesh HaRav (pg. 231). This author has heard from a talmid of Rav Soloveitchik's that he would go home early on Thanksgiving, but only after making sure to give Shiur, which sometimes lasted several hours. Apparently he wanted to show his talmidim that a secular holiday is by no means an excuse to take a day off from Torah.

[12]These Rabbanim's opinions appear in the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society (vol. 30, pg. 59).

[13]Pachad Yitzchak - Igrus U'Michtavim shel HaRav Hutner (109).

[14]Shu"t Mishna Halachos (vol. 10, 116). He does however concede on one point and clarifies that having a Thanksgiving seudah is not b'geder 'Yaharog V'al Yaavor', notwithstanding what was written in his name on a Kol Koreh!

[15]The Rabbis Cohen's opinions appear in the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society (vol. 30, pg. 59). Many of these Rabbonim have written letters on topic to the author of this extensive article, Rabbi Michael J. Broyde of Atlanta, Georgia.

[16]His reasoning is based on his understanding of the Rambam (Hilchos Malachim Ch. 10, 9), referring to the prohibitions of a Gentile to make for himself a day of rest akin to Shabbos or a Yom Moed. Rav Cohen posits that such a day is Thanksgiving which in essence, is an attempt by Gentiles to create a special day of festivities, and is therefore prohibited. However, it is not clear to this author why Thanksgiving should be considered similar to a Moed or Yom Tov, as there is no shevisas melacha involved with anyone's observance of the day. In fact, there is no actual observance of the day. The Rambam's intent regarding inclusion in the category of Goyim establishing a new Yom Tov would surely not incorporate the mere actions of sitting

down to eat a specific food. See Minchas Asher (vol. 1, Bereishis, Parshas Noach 11, pg. 66 - 67) who explains that according to the Rambam, in order for a Gentile's actions to qualify for this prohibition it needs to be a 'shevisa l'sheim chiddush das' and not just for rest (menucha); an example being where he would create a 'Moed gamur' with its own version of Kiddush, Tefillah, and Mitzvos of the day, akin to a Yom Tov. This would certainly preclude Thanksgiving whose observance meets none of this criteria. Perhaps this why the other machmirim do not make use of this halachic rationale to prohibit Thanksgiving celebrations.

[17]See, for example, Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky's 'Streets of Life' column in Ami Magazine #143, October 2, 2013, titled 'Tagging Along' pg. 94. I have also heard this from noted historian Rabbi Berel Wein. Parenthetically, Rabbi Kamenetsky also mentions that his grandfather, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l did not partake of the turkey, due to issues of Mesora; which is a topic for another time, IY"H.

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

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

© 1995-2015 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

---

### **Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Sotah 30 - 36**

*For the week ending 21 November 2015 / 9 Kislev 5776*

**by Rabbi Moshe Newman**

**Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, "Greater is a person who does (the will of G-d) due to love than a person who does (the will of G-d) due to fear." Sotah 31a**

This teaching is found in a beraita on our daf and has its basis in verses in Ex. 20:6, "And I (G-d) perform loving kindness to thousands (of generations) to those who love Me and to those who keep My commandments." This is compared to that the verse in Deut. 7:9, "Know, therefore, that the L-rd, your G-d He is G-d, the faithful G-d, Who keeps the covenant and loving kindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations." The first verse mentions the reward for those who do the will of G-d out of love for Him adjacent to "thousands of generations", whereas the second verse cited mentions those who keep G-d's commandments not adjacent to love of Him, but rather adjacent to fulfilling His mitzvot. Love is mentioned earlier in the verse, not with the mention of a thousand generations, which implies that the second verse is speaking about those who do His will "only" due to fear of Him, but not due to love. The first verse teaches that the merit of doing the will of G-d due to love leads to protection for the next 2,000 generations, whereas doing His will out of fear — but not love — results in Divine protection for fewer future generations — a thousand. (Rashi)

This teaching is not "mere philosophy"; it is a halacha that is codified by the Rambam in the Laws of Repentance 2:3.

**Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, "Why did our Sages establish that the prayer ("Shmoneh Esrei" or "Amida") be said quietly? In order not to embarrass transgressors." Sotah 32b**

Prayer should be said quietly, as we learn from the prayer of Chana when she prayed to bear a child, as the Torah states about her prayer, "and her voice was not heard" (Shmuel I 1:13). Our gemara teaches that this manner of prayer was established as the manner for the individual's "silent prayer" for the entire Jewish People, so that someone who is confessing in his prayer to G-d the transgressions he has, will not be embarrassed by another person present. If the prayers needed to be said aloud, people would refrain from confessing their transgressions due to embarrassment. (Rashi) The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 101:2) teaches that a person should say his prayer quietly but not completely silently; rather he should be the only person present to hear the words of his prayer. (More details and a variety of scenarios are taught in the Shulchan Aruch and in the Mishna Berura there.)

© 2015 Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

---

**Concentration Camp Uniforms, Protests, and Halacha  
Wednesday, November 18th, 2015**

The Nazis are known as the most vile and loathsome evil of living memory. It is thus particularly appalling when, to make a point, Jews apply this imagery to other people, let alone to other Jews.

Protesting the IDF draft toward Yeshiva students is one thing, but using Nazi imagery to make the point is not only a violation of sensibilities, but, in all probability, a violation of halacha as well. The fact that this was done a second time recently (<http://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/360697/photo-essay-1000s-in-jerusalem-gather-to-march-two-men-to-jail-for-evading-the-idf-draft-photos-by-shmiel-drei-jdn.html>), and in front of the Toldos Aharon Rebbe yet a second time, makes it necessary to voice how appalling it is.

There are no less than three issues as to how very wrong this is.

#### **Hurtful To Survivors**

When a holocaust survivor sees these horrible pictures of children in concentration camp uniforms, it is a very serious violation of Onaah. It causes the survivor pain and anguish. This is a violation of the verse in Vayikra, “velo sonu Ish es amiso – (VaYikra 25:17).”

The Mitzvah is generally called “Onaas Dvarim” or just plain “Onaah.” The Sfas Emes explains that the main reason behind this Mitzvah is so that we will all have a sense of complete oneness as a people. Causing another pain was prohibited because it causes division within us as a people. This is Onaah to the thousands of survivors.

#### **Debases The Memory Of The Martyrs**

The second issue is the fact that it truly debases the memories of the Kedoshim killed al kidush Hashem in the concentration camps of the Nazis yimach sh'mam. It cheapens the deaths of those that have passed on in the holocaust – the shochenei afar.

Those who perished in the holocaust are considered kedoshim martyrs. They died al Kiddush Hashem – because they were part of Hashem's nation. Debasing their memory is a horrific aveirah.

#### **Labelling Someone Improperly**

The third issue is the fact that the use of such imagery essentially places the label of “Nazi” on fellow Jews. The Gemorah in Kiddushin (28a) discusses the vile nature of three things:

- Calling someone an “eved.”
- Labelling another with the term “Mamzer.”
- Someone who labels another with the term “Rasha.”

Here, with the labelling of fellow Jews as the most evil of Rashaim that there are – a new boundary has been crossed far beyond the discussion in the Gemorah.

Some explain this that for such a person it is permitted to a] hate him b] enter into competition with his business and c] reduce his income by 1/3rd (see Rashi).

Furthermore, one who applies to another a negative appellation is counted among those who go down to Gehenam and do not arise (See Bava Metziah 58b).

Everyone is entitled to their own views. But we must exercise extreme caution to make sure that when making a point, Torah violations should not be stepped upon. The use of this imagery is in horrible taste and underscores a terrible insensitivity both to halacha and to others.

Those who are responsible for this should apologize for these three violations and look to protest in some other way.

The author can be reached at [yairhoffman2@gmail.com](mailto:yairhoffman2@gmail.com)  
(YWN World Headquarters – NYC)  
Copyright 2015; All rights reserved.