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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHOFTIM - 5771

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Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
Lord Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British
Commonwealth
[From 5769]
<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>
Shoftim 5769

In his enumeration of the various leadership roles within the nation that would take shape after his death, Moses mentions not only the priest/judge and king but also the **prophet**:

"The Lord your G-d will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Moses would not be the last of the prophets. He would have successors. Historically this was so. From the days of Samuel to the Second Temple period, each generation gave rise to men - and sometimes women - who spoke G-d's word with immense courage, unafraid to censure kings, criticize priests, or rebuke an entire generation for its lack of faith and moral integrity.

There was, however, an obvious question: How does one tell a true prophet from a false one? Unlike kings or priests, prophets did not derive authority from formal office. Their authority lay in their personality, their ability to give voice to the word of G-d, their self-evident inspiration. But precisely because a prophet has privileged access to the word others cannot hear, the visions others cannot see, the real possibility existed of false prophets - like those of Baal in the days of King Ahab. Charismatic authority is inherently destabilizing. What was there to prevent a

fraudulent, or even a sincere but mistaken, figure, able to perform signs and wonders and move the people by the power of his words, from taking the nation in a wrong direction, misleading others and perhaps even himself?

There are several dimensions to this question. One in particular is touched on in our sedra, namely the prophet's ability to foretell the future. This is how Moses puts it: You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. On the face of it, the test is simple: if what the prophet predicts comes to pass, he is a true prophet; if not, not. Clearly, though, it was not that simple.

The classic case is the Book of Jonah. Jonah is commanded by G-d to warn the people of Nineveh that their wickedness is about to bring disaster on them. Jonah attempts to flee, but fails - the famous story of the sea, the storm, and the "great fish". Eventually he goes to Nineveh and utters the words G-d has commanded him to say - "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed" - the people repent and the city is spared. Jonah, however, is deeply dissatisfied: But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate G-d, slow to anger and abounding in love, a G-d who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4: 1-3)

Jonah's complaint can be understood in two ways. First, he was distressed that G-d had forgiven the people. They were, after all, wicked. They deserved to be punished. Why then did a mere change of heart release them from the punishment that was their due? Second, he had been made to look a fool. He had told them that in forty days the city would be destroyed. It was not. G-d's mercy made nonsense of his prediction.

Jonah is wrong to be displeased: that much is clear. G-d says, in the rhetorical question with which the book concludes: "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" Should I not be merciful? Should I not forgive? What then becomes of the criterion Moses lays down for distinguishing between a true and false prophet: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken"? Jonah had proclaimed that the city would be destroyed in forty days. It wasn't; yet the proclamation was true. He really did speak the word of G-d. How can this be so?

The answer is given in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been prophesying national disaster. The people had drifted from their religious vocation, and the result would be defeat and exile. It was a difficult and demoralizing message for people to hear. A false prophet arose, Hananiah son of Azzur, preaching the opposite. Babylon, Israel's enemy, would soon be defeated. Within two years the crisis would be over. Jeremiah knew that it was not so, and that Hananiah was telling the people what they wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear. He addressed the assembled people: He said, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."

Jeremiah makes a fundamental distinction between good news and bad. It is easy to prophesy disaster. If the prophecy comes true, then you have spoken the truth. If it does not, then you can say: G-d relented and forgave. A negative prophecy cannot be refuted - but a positive one can.

If the good foreseen comes to pass, then the prophecy is true. If it does not, then you cannot say, 'G-d changed His mind' because G-d does not retract from a promise He has made of good, or peace, or return.

It is therefore only when the prophet offers a positive vision that he can be tested. That is why Jonah was wrong to believe he had failed when his negative prophecy - the destruction of Nineveh - failed to come true.

This is how Maimonides puts it: As to calamities predicted by a prophet, if, for example, he foretells the death of a certain individual or declares that in particular year there will be famine or war and so forth, the non-fulfilment of his forecast does not disprove his prophetic character. We are not to say, "See, he spoke and his prediction has not come to pass." For G-d is long-suffering and abounding in kindness and repents of evil. It may also be that those who were threatened repented and were therefore forgiven, as happened to the men of Nineveh. Possibly too, the execution of the sentence is only deferred, as in the case of Hezekiah. But if the prophet, in the name of G-d, assures good fortune, declaring that a particular event would come to pass, and the benefit promised has not been realized, he is unquestionably a false prophet, for no blessing decreed by the Almighty, even if promised conditionally, is ever revoked . . . Hence we learn that only when he predicts good fortune can the prophet be tested. (Yesodei ha-Torah 10: 4)

Fundamental conclusions follow from this. A prophet is not an oracle: a prophecy is not a prediction. Precisely because Judaism believes in free will, the human future can never be unfailingly predicted. People are capable of change. G-d forgives. As we say in our prayers on the High Holy Days: "Prayer, penitence and charity avert the evil decree." There is no decree that cannot be revoked. A prophet does not foretell. He warns. A prophet does not speak to predict future catastrophe but rather to avert it. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true it has failed.

The second consequence is no less far-reaching. The real test of prophecy is not bad news but good. Calamity, catastrophe, disaster prove nothing. Anyone can foretell these things without risking his reputation or authority. It is only by the realization of a positive vision that prophecy is put to the test. So it was with Israel's prophets. They were realists, not optimists. They warned of the dangers that lay ahead. But they were also, without exception, agents of hope. They could see beyond the catastrophe to the consolation. That is the test of a true prophet. A Good Sense of Humour is Simply Divine The Times - July 2008 The poet WH Auden used to quote the following as one of his favourite examples of Jewish humour. "Maybe," sighed the sage after a lifetime of contemplating human suffering, "it would have been better not to have been born. But how many are so lucky? Not one in a thousand!" From the earliest days, humour seems to have been part of the Jewish personality. The great third-century teacher Rav would always begin his classes in Jewish law with a joke. The Book of Esther, with its terrifying theme of attempted genocide, is nonetheless shot through with as many reversals and misunderstandings as a Whitehall farce. Even the Genesis story of the Tower of Babel contains wonderful touches of Divine humour. Men have decided to build a "tower whose top will reach the heavens". But G-d has to "come down" to see it, so minute is it from the perspective of heaven. Thus is man's hubris mocked. A sense of humour is not something we normally associate with the realm of faith. The religious personality is more likely to be linked in our mind with images of austere puritans or stern, unbending Victorians such as Gladstone, than with storytellers who have a twinkle in their eye.

If religion is a capacity to invest life with ultimate seriousness, then humour is precisely the opposite, an ability to say, "nothing is so serious that we cannot laugh". Jews though, and not only Jews, would disagree. It was Peter Berger, the American sociologist, who put it best when he spoke of the sense of humour as one of the "signals of transcendence" that break through into the human situation and remind us of something beyond. We are part of nature, but there is a dimension of human

consciousness that lies beyond nature. We are physical beings, but there are aspects of the human spirit that cannot be reduced to physics - and the ability to understand a joke is one of them. Could a computer have a sense of humour? Probably not. The reason, I would guess, is that humour has to do with our ability to see things differently, to escape from the cage of tragedy, to affirm the freedom of the mind.

What we can laugh at, we can rise above. Perhaps that is why Jews, along with other groups who have suffered much and suffered long, have developed a sense of humour as their defence against despair. Humour has something to do with hope. CS Lewis wrote: "Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice... Men propound mathematical theorems in beleaguered cities, conduct metaphysical arguments in condemned cells, make jokes on scaffolds, discuss the last new poem while advancing to the walls of Quebec and comb their hair at Thermopylae."

There is something majestic about a human nature that can detach itself from the immediate and float in the free air of the ultimate. And perhaps laughter - our ability not to take ourselves too seriously - is related to our ability to take other things very seriously indeed. Be that as it may, I am moved by the fact that the first child of the covenant was named Isaac, meaning "he who will laugh". His was not an easy life. As a child Isaac was almost killed. As a father he was deceived. For the last years of his life he was blind. However, his ability to laugh was the victory of faith over fate. And humour remains G-d's gift of humanity in a sometimes inhuman world.

from genesis@torah.org to rabiwein@torah.org date Wed, Aug 31, 2011 at 5:05 PM subject Rabbi Wein -- Parshas Shoftim

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Parshas Shoftim

The Torah's Path to Justice

This is the 'law and order' parsha of the Torah, so to speak. Implicit in studying it is the realization of the delicate balance between an ordered society, with some restraints on personal freedom and expression, and, on the other hand, a society of complete personal freedom but also of anarchy and chaos.

The judges and police that the Torah commands and authorizes are to be the arbiters that decide the rules of society and the acceptable behavior of its citizens. But, they are merely the enforcers of the law. It is the citizenry itself that sets the limits and mores of the society.

As we have recently seen, thousands of police cannot, by themselves, stop looting, rioting and other forms of social mayhem. There has to be an agreed upon social imperative within the society to make for order. Traffic flows because there is an unwritten but nevertheless binding agreement among drivers to observe traffic signals and stop lights.

Police can be a deterrent to law breakers but police do not guarantee a civil or lawful society. Eventually all societies based purely upon police power falter and fail. Again, witness what is happening in the countries that surround us. Police states cannot control beliefs, ideas and human longings. These eventually rise to the fore, unfortunately many times violently and in revolution, and assert themselves to be stronger than the power of the police state. Police are only valid as the enforcers of the public will. When they overstep that boundary they can become a very negative force in society.

The Torah bids judges and courts to rule fairly, justly and righteously. There is no judge in the world that enters the courtroom without personal prejudices and preconceived beliefs. Yet, the Torah still demands that this judge, burdened by this weight, weigh the matters before him fairly and decently. The pursuit of true justice is a never ending one.

The rabbis of the Talmud advised us to choose a court that has the established reputation for being fair, just and wise. The Talmud lists for

us courts and judges that met this description in the early centuries of the Common Era. Being a judge is always a lonely, difficult position. No one will be completely satisfied with a judge's decision. There always are perceived slights and injustices that occur in all legal proceedings.

The Torah bids all of us - judges, litigants, witnesses and the general public - to somehow rise above these inescapable human failings and continue to pursue justice and righteousness as best we can. The prophet challenges us "to create justice." All human creations have an element of imperfection incorporated within them. We should not allow the presence of this unavoidable imperfection to cloud our general view of the necessity for the pursuit of justice to continue.

Judges may falter and be found wanting, but the Torah's insistence upon the rule of justice and right in society is never ending. Both judges and police when set upon the Torah's path of pursuing justice and a moral society fulfill a vital role in society and government.

Shabat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

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<http://www.rabbiwein.com/Jerusalem-Post/2011/09/637.html?print=1>

Rabbi Wein 2 Elul 5771 / 01 September 2011

Jerusalem Post

THE BLUNT TRUTH

Friday, September 2, 2011

Last week I read two articles that caught my attention, stirred my blood and set me thinking again about our future. They were not about the Arab-Israeli dispute, not about the September United Nations session, not about so-called "social welfare" demonstrations in Israel. They were rather about the moral emptiness and malaise that has overtaken us as a result of the past sixty years of moral relativism, "humanitarian" behavior and a complete abandonment of the values and traditions of the Jewish people and its creed. One article was authored by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of the United Kingdom. In reviewing the scenes that took place in England last month, the riots, looting and killings, Rabbi Sacks stated in an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal: "Britain is the latest country to pay the price for what happened half a century ago in one of the most radical transformations in the history of the West. In virtually every Western society in the 1960's there was a moral revolution, an abandonment of the entire traditional ethic of self-restraint. All you need, sang the Beatles, is love. The Judeo-Christian moral code was jettisoned and in its place came: whatever works for you.

The Ten Commandments was rewritten as the Ten Creative Suggestions...The truth is that it is not their [the rioters'] fault. They are the victims of the tsunami of wishful thinking that washed across the West saying that you can have sex without the responsibility of marriage, children without the responsibility of parenthood, social order without the responsibility of citizenship, liberty without the responsibility of morality and self esteem without the responsibility of work and earned achievement.... [Society] needs religion; not as doctrine but as a shaper of behavior, a tutor in morality, an ongoing seminar in self-restraint and pursuit of the common good." Rabbi Sacks' eloquence is only matched by the unerring truth of his message. In a recent article written by Professor Dov Landau of Bar Ilan University and published in the Hebrew newspaper Makor Rishon he stated as follows: (the English translation is mine, BW) "Against the false and media engineered public protests about the perceived lack of more government aid to a generation raised on entitlements, a greater demonstration should be mounted against the past sixty years of government leadership in Israel that has systematically destroyed the dream of the Jewish ages and that has supported and accomplished the complete divorcement of Israel from Judaism and its values and traditions and turned our country into an empty vessel for its morally impoverished citizens. I and my friends,

the last survivors of the Holocaust, see ourselves as the representative remnant of European Jewry. We can no longer remain silent. We state that in opposition to the self congratulatory elitism of the media and rulers of Israel, that is basically false and fabricated, that they somehow created the state and maintain it, the truth is that they have over the last sixty years of rule emptied our state of any purpose or morality and certainly of any sense of holiness. They wanted to build a state like any other state in the world or as they phrase it "a state for all of its citizens." But for that purpose we need not have gathered here. We could be in Australia or Canada and there fulfill the "humanitarian" dream that so possesses our elitist rulers. Rather we demand that the state should reflect the hopes and dreams of the millions who died. We had a dream that was common to all of us. We wanted to see a Jewish state, a state of Torah and tradition and instead we are given a state of boorishness and ignorance of Judaism and its value system. We wanted a return to Jewish judges and justice and we received judges and "humanitarian" justice, "enlightened", with inbred nepotism and egotism unlimited. We prayed for a return to our holy places and we received abandonment of the Temple Mount to strangers and sworn enemies and created within our society informers and self haters. We prayed for righteous converts and we were given hundreds of thousands of non-Jews who are not interested in becoming Jewish.

We prayed for our and God's return to Jerusalem and we were given "pride" parades...Even if the leaders of our state can continue to advance our economic welfare, our industrial base, our medical care, scientific research and hi-tech achievements, if they do not begin to repair our moral chasm and spiritual Jewish bankruptcy, the state will sink away in the whirlpool of anarchy, nihilism, violence and the selfishness of post-modernism and elitism...Our request therefore is to save us from this hell of post-modernism and give us and our generations a modicum of hope for our future." Sometimes, the blunt truth needs to be told. Shabat shalom. Berel Wein

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from **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ryfrand@torah.org
date Thu, Sep 1, 2011 at 1:05 PM
subject Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shoftim

In memory of our son Danny Frei whose life was cruelly taken from us 16 years ago in Maale Michmash

Parshas Shoftim These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 822 - Making a Chanukas HaBayis For A New Home. Good Shabbos! The Special Role of the Kohen Who Reminds Us of the Source of Success at War They're here! ALL NEW Commuter's Chavrusa Devorim 24 is available, on tape or CD, to enlighten, inspire and perhaps amuse you with such fascinating topics as:
* "Finding Out If "It" Is A Boy Or Girl? A Good Idea?"
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and the *NEW TESHUVA DRASHA - REACHING UP BY REACHING OUT We also wish to inform you that Rabbi Frand's drasha, given on Tisha B'av this year 5771/2011, as part of the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation Tisha B'av event is now available on our website, www.yadychiel.org in MP3 format. Just click on the "Hot Off the Press" button to download it.

Before the Jewish people go out to war, a specially designated Kohen addresses the nation. He tells them "Hear O' Israel. You are going out today to do battle. You should not be afraid because the Almighty One will help you..." [Devorim 20:3] The Kohen who made this speech was known as the Priest Anointed for War (Kohen Mashuach Milchama). A Kohen was specifically anointed with the sacred anointing oil to have this job and to deliver this charge to the people before they went out to battle.

In several ways, the Kohen Mashuach Milchama is similar to the Kohen Gadol [the High Priest]. Unlike a regular Kohen, but in common with the Kohen Gadol, he is forbidden to marry a widow but must marry a virgin. Likewise he is given the privilege (in common with the High Priest) to pose questions to the Urim v'Tumim. In fact although there was an office called the segan [vice] Kohen Gadol, the Rambam writes [in Hilchos Klei HaMikdash 4:19] that the Kohen anointed for war outranked the segan Kohen Gadol.

It seems strange that the only known duty of the Kohen Mashuach Milchama was to address the people before they went out to battle. A person could perform such a job without working a single day his whole life! Wars are not an everyday occurrence. One can go years or decades without needing to make such a speech. It is conceivable that despite his exalted position such a Kohen never had to carry out the duties of his office.

This anomaly leads us to a simple question: Why not assign this job to the Kohen Gadol himself? Why create a new job title? Why not let the Kohen Gadol, or if not him the segan Kohen Gadol, perform this job if, and when, it becomes necessary to go to war?

Let us point out something else. The Rambam writes [in Hilchos Melachim 1:7] (regarding a son inheriting the throne from his father the king) "And not only regarding monarchy alone but all position of authority and all appointments in Israel are passed down through inheritance to one's son and one's grandson forever, providing the son is a worthy successor to his father in wisdom and in Fear (of Heaven)". However, the Rambam writes [in Hilchos Klei HaMikdash 4:21] that the position of Mashuach Milchama is an exception to the rule. This job does not pass on through inheritance to one's son, but rather the son of a Kohen Anointed for War is just a regular Kohen. Why does this exception exist?

Let us raise a third difficulty: The pasuk [verse] introducing the job of the Mashuach Milchama states: "And it will be when you draw near to battle the Kohen will approach (v'nigash haKohen) and speak to the people." [Devorim 20:2]. The two words v'nigash haKohen seem superfluous. What do they add? Obviously, the Kohen will not be standing a mile away when he gives the charge to the people. It is understood that he must approach the people before he begins to speak. In addition, usually the verb "hagasha" in Tanach connotes prayer. The Medrash tells us on the words "VaYigash eilav Yehudah" [Bereshis 44:18] that Yehudah approached Yosef with a prayer. Similarly when we find "Vayigash Eliyahu" [Melachim I 18:36] the prophet Elijah offered a prayer. Likewise, the words here "v'nigash haKohen" seem to imply that the Kohen Mashuach Milchama uttered some kind of prayer. The Torah does not tell us what prayer he uttered. What was it?

Finally, the Torah instructs that anyone who was afraid to go to battle was to return home [Devorim 20:8]. The Talmud states [Sotah 44b] that in addition to the simple interpretation of excluding someone who was actually afraid of doing battle on the battle field, this pasuk refers to someone who was afraid of aveiros [sins] he committed, which might make him undeserving of being saved in a time of danger. The Gemara says this would even include someone who merely violated the prohibition of talking between the time he put on his hand Tefillin and the time he put on his head Tefillin. Why, we ask, did the Talmud cite this specific example of a "small aveira"?

To answer all four questions, I would like to quote a very interesting approach from Rav Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg, the Tolner Rebbe, in his Sefer Heimah Yenachamuni. Rav Weinberg suggests that fighting a war presents a person with a very difficult spiritual test. A person needs to go to battle with weapons and with military strategy. A person needs to use the latest technology and to fight the battle the ways battles are fought -- with soldiers, arms, battle plans, etc. We have a strong perception and gut feeling that an army is victorious because of military prowess.

Viewing the matter from a spiritual point of view, we all know that this is not true. We know that the outcome of a battle is determined "Not with valor and not with strength but with My Spirit, says the L-rd of Hosts" [Zecharia 4:6]. We know that to think it is our military might that made us successful is heresy. It is falling into the trap of "My strength and the power of my hand made for me all this valor." [Devorim 8:17]

Those of us who remember the Six Day War in 1967 remember how the entire world was talking about the brilliant strategy of the Israeli army which defeated armies of tens of millions of Arabs. They decimated the forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in less than a week's time. There was a pervasive feeling of "we are so much smarter than them", "we are so much braver than them", "we are so much more technologically advanced than them". The attitude was indeed "My strength and the power of my hand made for me all this valor." This is a "treife hashkafa" -- an improper, mistaken philosophy.

Certainly, we cannot rely on miracles, but we must always keep in the forefront of our minds that "It is He who gives us the strength to have valor" [Devorim 8:18].

How can people avoid the trap? How can those who have to fight that battle and be out there in the foxhole and who are so apt to fall into the trap of "my strength and the power of my hands..." avoid the trap? What can prevent them from making this tragic mistake?

Prevention of this mistaken attitude was the job of the Kohen Mashuach Milchama. The Kohen Mashuach Milchama prevented them from adopting this "treife hashkafa" by telling them "Hear O Israel you are drawing near today towards a war with your enemy. Do not let your hearts become soft; do not fear nor be alarmed; do not be frightened of them..." That was his message. We may have the arms and we may have the most brilliant generals and the best strategy but we must know that in the final analysis it is the Master of the Universe who will help us win this war.

That was his job and that is why it says "v'nigash haKohen v'Diber el ha'Am" [the Priest drew near to speak to the nation]. This was not just a speech to the people. It was also a prayer to G-d. "Please, G-d, do not let my people fall prey to this foreign philosophy of 'the strength of my arms makes this valor for me'".

That is why the Kohen Gadol was not given this job. The Kohen Gadol spends his entire day and his entire life in the Beis HaMikdash. He is a person who is entirely spiritual. This job description does not require a holy person it requires a person who knows the temptations of what it is to be out there in the "real world" and to deal with these feelings of "it is my strength which accomplished all this". This job requires a unique special person.

That is why the Kohen Mashuach Milchama son does not automatically inherit the position. The position requires rare talents. Every generation needs a new Kohen Mashuach Milchama.

That is also the reason why the Talmud cites a person who spoke between putting on the hand Tefillin and the head Tefillin as the example of one who returns home from battle due to being afraid of his aveiros. The Tefillin shel Yad [Hand Tefillin] represent the attitude of "the strength of my hand". It is the head, the brain, which has to rein in such a philosophy of life. The Head has to rule over the Hand. One who pauses between donning the hand Tefillin and the head Tefillin believes that there can be a separation between the two. He believes there can be a

time when the philosophy of the Hand rules by itself and without being reined in by the philosophy of the Head. Such a person indeed must retreat from the battlefield.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Shoftim from the Commuter Chavrusah Series

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from **Rabbi BenZion Shafier** rebbe@theshmuz.com

subject **A chance to help a fellow Jew**

date Thu, Sep 1, 2011 at 1:39 PM

On Saturday, as Hurricane Irene approached David Reichenberg's community of upstate Spring Valley, the businessman finished studying Avodah Zara, a portion of Mishnah, with a learning partner of his. Then his chavrusa and their families celebrated their accomplishment with a siyum - Hebrew for completion - meal in Mr. Reichenberg's home.

Mr. Reichenberg and fellow learning partners had shared several such celebrations in the last few decades. Saturday's turned out to be his last siyum.

A longtime resident of the heavily Orthodox Monsey-Spring Valley area, Mr. Reichenberg died the next morning, in the aftermath of Irene, performing his final mitzvah.

Driving home from another learning session, he noticed a child in danger at the corner of Merrick Drive and Union Road, a tree-lined residential intersection near his home. Irene, which had struck the East Coast on Saturday night, had brought down a power line - 5-year-old Reuven David Herbst, who lives in Mr. Reichenberg's neighborhood, accidentally came in contact with a metal fence that carried a high-voltage electrical charge from wires that lay obscured on the flooded street. Standing in curbside water, he was being badly burned and could not pull away; his father, Rabbi Yehuda Herbst, was unable to reach him.

Mr. Reichenberg, an experienced outdoorsman, jumped out of his car, waded into the water and saved the pair, being electrocuted on the spot. At 50, a father of four, he was buried that night.

Now it is our turn to demonstrate our selflessness as we ensure that his dear wife should not have to suffer the pain of financial deprivation. The Hanhala of Ohr Somayach have established a special fund to provide for the future needs of the family and for the costs of special education for their autistic son. To donate, please go to:

<https://www.duvys.com/simple/reichenbergfund> Checks can also be sent by mail to: The Ohr Somayach Reichenberg Fund C/o Rabbi

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For Man is like the Tree of the Field

Rosh Hayeshiva Harav Mordechai Greenberg, shlita

"For Man is like the Tree of the Field." (Devarim 20:19) Beyond the simple meaning of this pasuk, which deals with the prohibition against wanton destruction, there is a deeper meaning to the simile of a tree. Man has the quality of a tree.

Man (adam) is named based on his source from the earth. The obvious question is: All living creatures were created from the earth -- "Let the earth bring forth living creatures." (Bereishit 1:24) Why was man, specifically, named after the earth?

The Maharal explains in a number of places that man is not named after the earth because of his source from the earth, for if so animals are more physical and closer to the earth. Rather, he is called so because he has the quality of the earth.

The earth has the ability to actualize all of the potential that is inherent within it. Moreover, when a seed is planted in it, the earth actualizes all of the potential inherent the seed. In the same way, the soul is planted in man, and he must uncover it and actualize it. A person who disregards his soul and does not actualize its potential is like a tree that does not bear fruit, and his whole creation is for naught. Therefore a person who does not learn Torah is called a "boor," like earth that is not worked. Not so an animal (behema), that does not have hidden powers, and is created in its full form. "A one day old ram is called a ram." Therefore only man is named after the earth, whereas animals are called behema, indicating "bah mah," whatever is in it -- is in it, and no more.

In this way man is similar to a tree, that he must produce his fruits, which are the mitzvot and good deeds, as it says, "Tell [each] righteous person that it is good; for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds" (Yeshaya 3:10); "He shall be like a tree ... that yields its fruit in its season." (Tehillim 1:3) Similarly, in the end of our parsha, in the section of the eglu arufah (axed heifer), Rashi comments, "Let a calf in its first year, that did not produce fruit, come and be axed ... to atone for the murder of this [person] who was not allowed to produce fruit." (Rashi Devarim 21:4) The conclusion of the Gemara in Sotah (46a) is that this means that he was not allowed to be involved in Torah and mitzvot.

However, there are two differences between man and a tree:

A tree produces fruit naturally, whereas a person produces them through his own free will.

A tree's roots are below, and it draws its sustenance from the physical earth, whereas man is an "upside-down" tree, and his roots are above, from under the Divine Throne.

Since repentance means returning to the source, to Hashem, it is something infinite, and therefore man's responsibility to actualize himself is never ending. Therefore the Maharal and Rav Kook zt"l write that there is no concept of perfection for man, but only for G-d. Man's completion is through seeking perfection, moving towards perfection, aspiring and desiring to achieve perfection. Therefore, Teshuva is not only for the wicked but also for the righteous, since repentance is not only from bad to good, but also from a lower level to a higher one, from something small to something great.

Furthermore, just as with a tree, even if in the winter season it seems that it has lost its strength, one should not despair, since in the time of spring it will blossom once again.

Therefore we read in the beginning of Elul, "For man is like the tree of the field," to indicate the obligation for completion and self-actualization towards the new year.

<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page
by **Fred Toczek** –

A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)
Shoftim

D. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Be a judge of your own behavior before the behavior of others. "Judges and police you shall place for yourself". Rabbi Simcha Bunim commented "that is, before you make judgements about other people, judge yourself first". As the Sages said, "first correct yourself and only then correct others".

2. Regardless of how wise you are, if you are biased you will not be objective and will not be able to see the total truth. "For bribery blinds the eyes of wise men". There is no greater bias than our desire to see ourselves in a positive light; we do not want to see any fault in ourselves and like to believe that we are full of virtues. This bias prevents us from taking a honest look at ourselves and objectively finding our faults and limitations. But self-improvement is the goal of our existence, and because it is so important we must force ourselves to reject the "bribe" of our own bias. Make every effort to view your life as that of a total stranger -- only when you can honestly see who and where you are can you grow spiritually and improve your character traits.

E. Majesty of Man (Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz)

Preparing the way. "You should prepare the way so that every murderer should flee there". The Torah implores the Jews to "prepare the way" for the unintentional murderer to reach the safe haven of the City of Refuge. Thus, they prepared road signs that pointed the way to the nearest City of Refuge. The Talmud (in Makkos) states that just as Hashem shows the way for the unintentional murderer, He certainly does the same for the righteous. Hashem places "road signs" for all of us, directing us to the correct path to follow for a successful life. When the unintentional murderer came to a fork in the road, the sign pointed him in the right direction. We too have a road map -- the Torah -- when we reach a fork in the path of life.

F. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

Everyone is a judge. "Judges and enforcing officers shall you give unto yourself." The words "you" and "yourself" in the Hebrew text are in the singular. This is therefore not only a communal mitzvah, i.e., to establish a judicial system, but also an order to each individual to develop a "judge" and an "enforcing officer" within himself. Every person has the obligation to sit in judgment on his own actions. There are many laws that regulate the conduct of judges. First and foremost is that a judge may not take a bribe. Regardless of how great and learned a person may be, he is not only vulnerable to the perverting effects of a bribe, but the Torah says that such distortion of judgment is inevitable. We constantly make judgments in our daily lives. Sometimes we ponder about whether to do something, and at other times we come to a conclusion to act or not act with little or no deliberation. In either case we have made a judgment and we must therefore ask ourselves, was this judgment made objectively or were we "bribed"? Whenever there is a personal interest involved, there is the potential for a "bribe." How can we escape the risk of being misled by our personal interests? Pirkei Avos teaches, "provide yourself with a teacher, and acquire for yourself a trusted companion." The objective opinions of people who sincerely care for us may help prevent us from being misled by ulterior motives into making decisions which are not truly just.

G. In the Garden of the Torah (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z"l)

A measuring rod. Ever since his creation, man has felt the need to search for truth. Simultaneously, however, he has had to face the limits implied by his own subjectivity, and the awareness that the insights he discovers are thus limited in scope. By giving the Torah, G-d provided

mankind with an absolute standard of Truth. In contrast to our subjective insights, the Torah gives us objective values -- guidelines and principles that are applicable in every situation, in every place and at every time. What is man's responsibility? To judge. To subject himself and his surroundings to scrutiny and to determine the conduct prescribed by the Torah. He should then act upon that judgment and endeavor to modify his life and environment accordingly. In this way, he elevates himself and his surroundings, lifting them into a connection with G-d that transcends human conceptions of good.

From Shema Yisrael Torah Network shemalist@shemayisrael.com
Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date Thu, Sep 1, 2011 at 2:58 AM subject

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Shoftim

Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it?... And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go and return to his house. (20:5, 7)

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that these individuals are to return home - not as a dispensation - but as a demand. They are disqualified from battle, because they are considered weak. Their minds will wander to what or to whom they left behind at home and, as a result, they will affect the emotions of the other soldiers, who will become disheartened. A soldier must remain focused on his mission, on the battle, on the enemy. **Horav Arye Leib Bakst, zl**, explains that a good soldier is one who views himself as part of the larger whole. He will, thus, sacrifice his life, if necessary, for the good of the tzibur, greater group, in which he finds himself. One who is involved with himself, his mind wandering to his personal issues, is a tarnished soldier. His effectiveness is greatly diminished. Such a soldier is concerned with his own personal needs - not the needs of the regiment. Furthermore, his selfishness will spread and soon there will be much discontent festering within the army. It does not take more than one malcontent, one coward, to take down an entire regiment. Thus, these men are asked to leave and return home where they will, at least, be effective on the home front.

The Rosh Yeshivah cites the Mishnah in Meseches Rosh Hashanah 16a: "At four junctures during the year the world is judged: on Pesach for the grain; on Shavuot for the fruit of the tree; on Rosh Hashanah all who enter the world pass before Him like bnei maron; on Succos they are judged for water." The Mishnah changes its syntax pertaining to Rosh Hashanah. Regarding the other three festivals, the Mishnah informs us for what they are being judged. Concerning Rosh Hashanah, however, it appries the reader of the method of judgment. It should have said: "On Rosh Hashanah, all men are judged."

Rav Bakst posits that the answer lies in the Talmud's, (ibid. 18a) interpretation of bnei maron. In one explanation the term maron is related to marus, which means authority. Thus, ki'bnei maron means like the soldiers of the house of Dovid HaMelech, who were counted one at a time as they walked out to war in single file. When a Jew is judged on Rosh Hashanah, he is evaluated as a soldier. A person is not judged individually as a single unit, but as part of a whole congregation. This is one of Hashem's kindnesses, because, on his own, man stands little chance of achieving a favorable ruling. It is only as part of a larger group that he has hope. There is one issue: How much has he contributed to the tzibur, community? A soldier is judged commensurate with his devotion to his unit, his dedication to helping the collective war effort. On the other hand, those who live for themselves, to satisfy their own personal desires, will not be granted a sympathetic judgment.

The stirring prayer, U'Nesaneh Tokef, which we recite during the Mussaf service of the Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days, describes the scene in Heaven as Hashem sits in judgment: "The angels of Heaven are dismayed and are seized with fear and trembling, as they proclaim,

'Behold the Day of Judgment! The Hosts of Heaven are to be arraigned in judgment, for in Your eyes even they are not free from guilt. And all who enter the world pass before You like bnei maron.'" Rav Bakst explains that the Heavenly Hosts tremble because they are alone - each one distinct from the other. There is no tzibur in Heaven; the angels do not have the concept of a k'hal, congregation. Thus, they are filled with fear: How can they succeed in judgment on their own? Klal Yisrael, however, has the advantage of coming before Him as bnei maron, as soldiers who are part of a large unit. While they pass in single file, they are all part of one totality. How important it is for each one of us to attach himself to the greater whole of Klal Yisrael, by praying not only for himself, but for all members of his large family who are in need of blessing.

A soldier in Hashem's army must maintain focus on his mission, which is Torah study. Digressing from one's concentration is to lose focus on the mission. Achieving the kesser Torah, crown of Torah, should be the goal of a Jew. Every Jew is born with a potential for success. Achieving one's full potential defines his success. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, would often comment on the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos which uses a kesser, crown, as the metaphor for portraying success in Torah. He explains that a crown is unique in that its value and significance transcend the quality and material equivalent of the precious jewels which comprise its physical structure. Its worth is not determined by how many diamonds it has or by the weight of the gold from which it is formed. The value of a crown lies in the majesty it symbolizes, the perfection it represents.

Thus, a crown which has the slightest imperfection, the most miniscule flaw, loses its value as a crown. It might still be a valuable piece of jewelry, but it is no longer a crown. Its transcendent worth as a symbol of perfection is devalued by its flaw. A king will not wear a defective crown.

The crown of Torah should be the aspiration of every Jew. To wear that faultless crown means to achieve it by studying Torah to the fullest of one's potential. Anything less will only engender a defective crown, one whose value has been considerably diminished.

How does one reach this goal? How does one achieve the distinction of wearing the perfect crown of Torah? Focus, concentration, diligence are words that come to mind. In Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:13, the Rambam outlines it very succinctly: "Anyone who wishes to earn the crown of Torah should take care not to waste even one night on only sleeping, eating, talking and the like, but he should spend his night studying Torah and the words of wisdom." Na'eh doresh na'eh mekayeim, Rav Aharon was the embodiment of such a person - every moment of his life was devoted to his precious Torah.

In his biography of the Rosh Yeshivah of Telshe, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, Rabbi Yechiel Spero poignantly describes Rav Gifter's intensity of Torah study. The Rosh Yeshivah lived and breathed Torah. It coursed through his veins. It was his greatest joy, his greatest love. He was a firm believer that the only thing that could rebuild the "world that was" - a world that was lost - was intense, undiluted Torah study.

In 1953, a young man entered the portals of Telshe, America. It was obvious from his attitude that learning was not his top priority. He was far from serious - at first. The transformation came about one day - out of the blue. He happened to be in the bais ha'medrash when it was just about empty, and he heard a remarkable sound. The sound emanated from Rav Gifter who was bent over his Gemorah, learning aloud with great concentration. The sound compelled him to listen, and that he did. He was mesmerized by the intensity, the hidden joy that seemed to resonate with the sound. He could not leave his place as he continued to sit there for hours, listening to the sound that was emitting from the Rosh Yeshivah. The image was gripping and memorable. Indeed, it never left him. Seder began, and bochurim entered the cavernous study hall, each bochur finding his designated seat. Never did Rav Gifter take his eyes off the Gemorah. Five hours went by, and the young man sat there transfixed

by the sight of the Rosh Yeshivah learning. He knew that he had just observed greatness. He had witnessed Torah being transmitted from Sinai. This experience never left him; it changed his outlook on Torah learning. Almost sixty years later, he attributes his personal success in Torah to the revelatory experience of that day.

This is what it means to be focused on Torah study. One is not aware of anything taking place in his proximity. He is glued to the Torah. That is all that matters, because nothing else really exists.

...

Va'ani Tefillah Kaddish

There is no prayer more accepted by every segment of the Jewish People than the Kaddish. Regardless of one's religious affiliation, Kaddish is the prayer that all recite. When one takes note of the meaning of the text, it is not surprising that it receives such wide acceptance. As Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains, "Kaddish is an expression of that avowal of Judaism which is to be preserved at all times, wherever we may be; namely that, whatever course the events of life may take, eventually Shemai rabba, the greatness of Hashem's Name, in all its significance, will be recognized and sanctified by all - irrefutably and without reservation, in a world, 'which He Himself created in accordance with His will.'"

The goal for which G-d has made the world will surely be reached, this goal being simply: Kiddush Hashem throughout the world. It is this hope that has sustained Klal Yisrael throughout its trials and tribulations. The public avowal of this hope constitutes the very foundation upon which our entire congregational worship is based. Thus, at the end of every major portion of our prayers, the chazzan who leads the service restates this on behalf of the entire congregation. The Amen response affirms the congregation's adoption of this declaration as the life-sustaining force of their existence. Y'hei Shmei rabba is the congregation's own declaration of its desire and trust that Hashem's Name be blessed and sanctioned throughout this world. While we reflect upon the meaning of the Kaddish text, we begin to realize why it has been the one prayer that has been accepted throughout time by virtually everyone. It defines the essence of Jewish belief.

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