

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

EMOR

Haftarah: Yehezkel 44:15-31

MAY 4-5, 2018 20 IYAR 5778

**DEDICATION: In memory of Mordechai ben Rachel - Mr. Max E. Tawil A"H
And Yishaak ben Zehiya – Mr. Isaac Suede A"H
Mabrook to Renee and Abie Kassin on the birth of baby Emily
Happy birthday Moses**

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Editor's Notes:

Would We Have Acted Differently? Emor 5777

We begin this week's portions with Hashem telling Moses, Emor El HaKohanin ... Speak to the Kohanim the children of Aaron, VeAmarta Aleyhem ... And say to them. The rabbis ask why the double language of Emor and Amarta, say and say? From this we learn that one generation is responsible to teach another generation. I also see a lesson in the use of the word emor as opposed to the word daber. The rabbis teach that emor is used to speak in a soft way as opposed to daber which is used to speak in a harsh manner. Perhaps there is a lesson to try to teach in a soft manner.

When I told the following story I heard from Rabbi A Leib Sheinbaum of Cleveland, my friend Mark Raymer mentioned that it sounded typical of Rav Kook who saw the best in everyone and elevated everyone he met.

The story takes place in 1945. Rabbi Moshe David Tenenbaum, zl, who was then head of the Vaad HaYeshivos in the Holy Land, went for a vacation in a small village in the north. As he was walking one day, a member of a nearby kibbutz approached him and asked if he could serve as the tenth man for a minyan. At first, the rabbi thought the fellow was teasing him, since it was a non-religious kibbutz and prayer with a minyan, was uncommon to say the least. How surprised he was when he arrived at the kibbutz to meet the other members of the minyan. His surprise increased when he discovered that they were not praying, but rather, performing a Brit Milah. The mohel, ritual circumciser, was a fellow in shorts, who did not appear to be observant. Nonetheless, the mohel recited the blessings fluently and performed the circumcision flawlessly, with apparent skill.

Immediately following the ceremony, the rabbi approached the mohel and asked him where he had practiced to become such a specialist. The man explained that he used to be a Vishnitzer Chasid and had for years been a mohel in Vishnitz. Upon arriving in Israel, his relationship with Hashem had waned, and once he joined the kibbutz, he had naturally become estranged from Jewish observance. Nonetheless, he still retained his skill as a mohel, which he employed when needed.

They finished their conversation, and Rav Moshe David was about to leave when the father of the infant came over and made a request: "We have an elderly grandfather who - due to his failing health - was unable to attend the ceremony. I am sure that it would mean the world to him if you could visit with him a moment and extend a blessing of mazel tov." Rav Moshe David was only too happy to hearten an elderly Jew. He went to the home and met the grandfather, who was confined to a wheelchair. He sat down next to him and began a conversation. He introduced himself as hailing from Jerusalem where he was a chasid of Karlin. As soon as he mentioned his connection with Karlin, the grandfather's eyes perked up, and he said, "I must tell you a story.

"I immigrated to Israel from Germany, where I had lived an assimilated lifestyle (as did many German Jews who had fallen under the influence of the scourge of Haskalah, Enlightenment.) One Friday night, my friend informed me that a Chassidic Rebbe - Rabbi Yisrael Perlow, zl, had arrived in Germany for health reasons. Chassidic Rebbes were not common in Germany and certainly not in Berlin. We felt it would be an interesting sight (a Rebbe conducting his Tish surrounded by his Chassidim around a large table). I already owned a car, so although it was Shabbat, we drove over to where the Rebbe was conducting his Tish.

"We entered the large room to see the Rebbe about to speak. 'I rarely speak Torah thoughts at the Shabbos Tish,' the Rebbe began. 'Since I am a guest visiting Berlin, however, I will change my custom and say divrei Torah.' That Shabbos was Parashas Kedoshim. It has been quite some time, and I have gone through much since that time. Nonetheless, I

was so impacted by the holy Rebbe's words, I remember them as if they were today. The Rebbe began with the opening words of the parsha, Kedoshim tiheyu, 'You shall be holy.' He then quoted the rest of the pasuk and the next; the Torah's enjoinder to revere parents, followed by the commandment to observe Shabbat, with the closing words - 'I am Hashem.'

"What is the relationship between these statements?' the Rebbe asked. 'It all depends on to whom one is speaking. To my Chassidim, it is sufficient to simply say to them - "You shall be holy." However, there are Jews for whom this is almost too much to ask (being that they are no longer religiously-connected with Hashem). To them, the Torah says, "Every man: your father and mother shall you revere." If you are no longer observant, then at least do what your parents did. Surely, there must have been a semblance of Jewish observance at home. Attempt to maintain old family practices (as a way of holding onto Judaism). As long as one holds on, there is hope. Sadly, there are Jews who have distanced themselves, so that they are not prepared to observe all of the practices that were part of their life growing up at home. To them the Torah admonishes: at least keep My Shabbos. That much you do remember.'

"I thought it was over, when, suddenly, the Rebbe raised his voice, banged on the table and declared, 'From you, Jews of Berlin, even that we cannot expect. (You have gravitated away so far, distancing yourselves from ritual observance, parental customs, even the basics, like Shabbos.) You should at least remember, "Ani Hashem, I am Hashem! Remember that there is a Creator Who guides this world!"

"The Rebbe's pounding on the table set off a pounding in my heart. At that time, I had a daughter who was engaged to marry a gentile (that was Berlin in those days. Sadly, it was not uncommon). I did not need more. The Rebbe's pounding continued to pound in my chest. I dropped everything, and within a week, I was on a boat to Eretz Yisrael. If you saw today a grandchild of mine receive a Brit Milah, it is only because I attended the Rebbe's Tish. That night's pounding of Ani Hashem has been my conscience throughout these years."

The rabbi went on to explain that the casual spectator who sees such a non-observant man does not take the time to wonder if there is another side to the story. He might easily disregard the many grandfathers we all often see. Do we ever stop to think: Why? Why is he like this? What was his background: Who turned him off? Was he ever turned on? What kind of life did he have?

He continued, I meet such people every week in various settings. Some never had a chance. Some were even raised Orthodox but assimilated when they went off to school. For some it was financial, peer pressure, ignorance, lack of interest, but everyone has a story. We must never forget this. We must never judge - because, who knows, if given similar circumstances, whether we would have acted differently - or even worse?

I was so moved by these words. I thought every teacher and every parent should hear them. I wanted to know more about Rabbi Perlow, the Stoliner Rebbe who passed away shortly after this story, I thought of what a remarkable man he must have been. I wanted to know more about Rabbi Tennebaum who had such tremendous insight and when I thought about what Mark had said, it really made sense. This sounded like Rav Kook and perhaps is why Rav Kook was the great man he was. It behooves us all to study the words and writings of such special people and hope that some of it brushes up on us.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

**Schumer Too Busy to Meet With Pro-Israel Group About Rising Anti-Semitism on Campus
BY: Elizabeth Harrington**

Senator Chuck Schumer's office said the Democratic minority leader is too busy to meet with pro-Israel activists who support the nomination of Ken Marcus to lead the Department of Education's office of civil rights.

Emails obtained by the Washington Free Beacon reveal that much like Democratic senators who have stonewalled Marcus's nomination, Schumer's office has delayed meeting with members of the grassroots organization Stop BDS on Campus.

Marcus's nomination to be assistant secretary for civil rights has lingered in the Senate for six months. Marcus is the founder and president of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing civil rights of the Jewish people.

Marcus's nomination has been stonewalled amid reports that anti-Semitism has risen by 94 percent in U.S. schools. Last week, 51 student groups at New York University pledged to boycott Israel.

Marcus did not clear the Senate HELP committee until February, after resistance from Democrats. While weighing his nomination, a senior Democratic staffer to Sen. Patty Murray (D., Wash.) on the committee said, "We don't care about anti-Semitism in this office." Anti-Israel groups also adamantly oppose his nomination.

Naomi Friedman, the founder of Stop BDS, has attempted to meet with Schumer about the urgency of Marcus's nomination for months, to no avail. Schumer's office pushed back against the notion the minority leader is stonewalling the Marcus nomination.

"Senator Schumer has spoken out forcefully against BDS on numerous occasions. He has said publicly, as recently as this week, that BDS is, in fact, a form of anti-Semitism," said Justin Goodman, a spokesman for Sen. Schumer. "He also carefully reviews all nominees based on their qualifications and views across a wide range of issues."

Stop BDS, which fights against the boycott, divestment, and sanctions of Israel movement, began calling Sen. Schumer's office on Dec. 21, over six weeks after Marcus was nominated. The next month, Stop BDS reached out to schedule a meeting on Jan. 26.

After hearing nothing, Friedman's mother was able to speak to Schumer at an Ohio fundraiser and asked for the contact information of the key staffer in charge of the Marcus nomination. He gave information for Nick Kutryb, the finance director of his super PAC Friends of Schumer.

Friedman did not hear from Schumer's office until weeks later, when she received a call from Mike Iannelli, a special assistant in Schumer's New York office. On Feb. 8, Iannelli promised to put the group in contact with the key staffer in charge of the nomination by the end of the week.

Iannelli called the next week to assure Friedman that Schumer "opposes BDS and anti-Semitism, and that he will arrange for a meeting with a key staffer."

Friedman never again heard from Iannelli but was able to obtain emails of other Schumer staffers the next month. A meeting was finally held with Steve Barton, Schumer's director of intergovernmental relations, on March 14.

During the meeting, Friedman and a dozen New York constituents provided Barton with personal accounts of anti-Semitism they have witnessed, how Marcus

had intervened in these situations, and why they believe it is critical to confirm his nomination.

Barton emailed Friedman on March 16, thanking her for the meeting.

"I really appreciate hearing your group's concerns directly—and I hope that you all found it a useful dialogue, too," he said. "I appreciate the time and commitment that you all have put into this matter."

Barton asked for additional information Friedman had on her work against BDS and any other information related to Marcus's nomination.

"I have conveyed your concerns and arguments directly to our most senior staff and our Israel and nominations teams," Barton said. "I will also touch base with our scheduling team to discuss the feasibility of a meeting with Sen. Schumer."

More than a month later, a meeting with Schumer has yet to happen. Barton now says Schumer is too busy.

Friedman sent Barton a 20-page report documenting the rise of anti-Semitism on campus and its correlation to anti-Zionist student groups.

The report noted 99 percent of all schools with a chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine or similar anti-Israel group experienced "at least one anti-Semitic incident."

The report featured testimonies from Democratic constituents of Schumer, who urged the minority leader to move forward on Marcus's nomination to "protect the Jewish people and the civil rights of students on university campuses."

"It could be that Democrats take their Jewish constituents for granted," said Betty Berenson of Scarsdale, New York. "The Jewish community votes for Democrats at approximately 80 percent, and they could think that we are not at risk in our support for Democrat candidates. This assumption does not take into consideration that our commitment to Israel and to fighting attacks against the Jewish state, is far greater than our commitment to the Democrat party."

"You said that we must 'stand firm against the BDS movement' and recognize that it is based in anti-Semitism," Berenson told Schumer. "We are giving you the chance to act on your values."

Friedman urged Schumer to act on Marcus's nomination in a follow up email to Barton on March 26.

"While the Democratic Party may have political reasons to delay or prevent the confirmation of Trump nominees, we strongly believe that Senator Schumer would choose to leave a legacy of standing against the intensifying hatred that threatens the American-Jewish community and weakens its relationship to the Democratic Party," she said.

Friedman received no response until she sent a follow-up email on April 13, asking whether Schumer was stonewalling the Marcus nomination.

"Our [New York] activists are becoming increasingly concerned that you have not responded to our request to arrange a meeting with Senator Schumer," Friedman said in an email to Barton, Iannelli, and Kutryb. "As you likely know, conservative media has reported that the Democrats are stonewalling the Marcus nomination."

"Our own experience is beginning to confirm that claim," she said.

Friedman noted Stop BDS has been trying to meet with Schumer since late January, back when the New York Times reported Marcus was "near confirmation."

"It is hard to believe that Senator Schumer would deliberately choose to strengthen the hand of anti-Semitic groups, but at this point this is de facto what he is doing," Friedman said. "If you feel this is not his or your intent, please do let us know."

Barton replied two days later, saying it has "been a busy time in the office."

"I'm still working with our scheduling team to see if a meeting might be possible," he said. "The calendar has been pretty full lately with all that's happening in Washington, but I am continuing to raise the request/question. I'll let you know as soon as I have an update."

Schumer introduced a bill dealing with marijuana use on Friday.

Barton said he wanted to "assure" Friedman that Schumer had seen her report as well as the senior staff in charge of Marcus's nomination.

"Thank you for taking the time to carefully compile that information—it's a really great, helpful resource," he said.

"As I hoped to make clear on our call, Sen. Schumer takes BDS extremely seriously and uses every opportunity to speak out against it," Barton added. "It's certainly not his intent to bolster an anti-Semitic group—and I think his public record reflects an abiding commitment to the Jewish community in New York, America, and across the world."

Barton ended the email thanking Friedman for her patience.

Monday marks the 175th day since Marcus was nominated.

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Emor - Holiness regarding Kohanim, Holidays

- 1- Laws of a regular Kohen and a Kohen gadol (who he can become tameh for, mourn for, and marry)
- 2- Blemishes that disqualify a Kohen from service, laws regarding a Kohen who becomes tameh (and what kodshim he can eat), who a Kohen can share his teruma with
- 3- Blemishes and other characteristics that disqualify an animal for a korban
- 4- Holidays - Pesach, Omer, Shavuot
- 5- Holidays- Rosh Hashana, Kippur
- 6- Holidays- Succoth, Shemini Asseret
- 7- Details regarding the menorah and the show bread, the blasphemer, laws of murder and damages

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE "You shall not profane My Holy Name." (Vayikra 22:32)

The Hafess Hayim once said that a religious Jew is like an officer of rank whose uniform indicates his level of closeness to the King. When such an officer behaves in an inappropriate fashion, not only does he violate his own honor, but his actions are also offensive to the King himself.

Indeed, the Hafess Hayim took extreme care that no Hillul Hashem should be caused through him. He was once waiting at the station for the train to Vilna, which was due to arrive within a few minutes. Suddenly, a person approached him and asked, "Can the Rav come up to our home? There is a family sitting shiva, and we are missing one person for a minyan."

The Hafess Hayim, who had already prayed, did not hesitate for a minute and hurried to comply with the man's request.

He "missed" the train to Vilna, and had to wait many hours for the next train, but the Hafess Hayim was very happy. He said, "It was worth it, because if I would have refused, that may have caused a Hillul

Hashem, and there is nothing more serious than that!" Rabbi Reuven Semah

“Say to the kohanim...he shall not become tameh to a dead person” (Vayikra 21:1)

The kohanim, who served in the Bet Hamikdash, have a special restriction that prohibits them from becoming tameh (spiritually contaminated) by coming in contact with any dead person other than their seven closest relatives. The kohen gadol, though, was not even permitted to become tameh from his relatives. What is the reason for this difference?

A kohen is a kohen solely due to the fact that he was born into a family of kohanim. There is nothing anyone can do to make himself a kohen if he belongs to a different family. For that reason, when a kohen's relative passes way, he is obligated to take part in the burial. The only reason he is a kohen in the first place is because he belongs to this family, so it would not be appropriate for his priestly status to now separate him from his family. Quite the contrary, he is required to become tameh in this situation, even though he would become disqualified from performing the service in the Bet Hamikdash for seven days, in order to acknowledge that his status is entirely due to his familial connection. In contrast, the kohen gadol reached his elevated status based on his merit so he is not permitted to invalidate himself by becoming tameh even from his relatives.

We can learn an important lesson from here. Just like the kohen is obligated to acknowledge that his special position was not self-acquired, but rather came through another person, we also need to recognize how much others have done for us to help us become who we are. Our parents, our teachers, our family members and our peers have all contributed to our development, and they should all be acknowledged and appreciated. And of course, rather than taking credit for our accomplishments, we should always thank Hashem for giving us whatever talents and abilities He has given us. Even when we accomplish great things, it's important to remember that we couldn't have done it without Him! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

The Instinct to Survive

“Every organ and limb of the body is designed to fulfill a purpose. The human body is the most perfect of all Hashem's creatures on this earth. It is adaptable for all environments, whereas animals live in climates that are specifically suited for them. Human beings are more capable of surviving difficult conditions than any other animal.”

One should be thankful to Hashem for the G-d given talent for human survival. With Hashem's graciousness, this instinct has been gifted to the

survival of our nation for thousands of years. (Norman D. Levy, based on Rabbi Miller's Duties of the Mind.)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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The Trickle-Down Effect**

Parashat Emor begins with the special laws that apply to the Kohanim. The commentators noted that the Torah opens this section with a seemingly redundant phrase: “G-d said to Moshe: Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them...” Surprisingly, G-d instructs Moshe to “speak to the Kohanim” and “say to them” that they are bound by the special laws of the priesthood, suggesting that these laws are to be spoken to the Kohanim twice, and the obvious question arises as to why this is the case. The Sages answered that the second phrase – “and say to them” – was added “Le'hazhir He'gedolim Al Ha'ketanim,” to require the adult Kohanim to ensure that their children also comply with these rules. This instruction is repeated to indicate that the Kohanim must not only obey these special laws, but also see to it that their children do the same.

While this explanation answers the question regarding the redundancy in this verse, we cannot overlook the fact that the text here makes no mention at all of the children. This statement refers to the instructions given only to the Kohanim themselves about their compliance with their laws. Yet, somehow, this repetition also speaks of the successful transmission of these laws to the next generation, to the Kohanim's offspring.

The reason why this is so touches upon one of the fundamentals of parenting: actions speak much louder than words. The way the Torah admonishes the Kohanim to ensure their children's compliance with these laws is by repeating the requirement that they themselves comply with these laws – because that is the most effective educational strategy. Preaching and scolding children has far less of an effect than teaching by personal example. If we want our children to grow with an appreciation of and commitment to tradition, we have to set an example for them to follow. We have to show them just how important tradition is to us, how far we ourselves go to observe the Torah, and there is then a good chance that they will follow suit.

The story is told of a certain Rabbi who ate breakfast with his family and then left to the yeshiva where he taught. Upon arriving in the yeshiva, he realized that he had not recited Birkat Ha'mazon. The house was not a short walk from his house, but he nevertheless put on his jacket, went out into the winter cold, and made the trek home. His son was surprised to see his father come in at that hour, and the father explained to him that he needed to return home to recite Birkat Ha'mazon.

The Hinuch (training in Misvot) that was achieved by the Rabbi that morning was more than could possibly be achieved by any amount of lecturing and haranguing about the importance of Birkat Ha'mazon. The child saw his father's commitment to this Misva, and this spoke much louder than any words.

This applies not only to child-rearing, but also more generally to our desire to influence the people around us and have a positive impact upon the Jewish people and the world. When we look around, it is hard not to notice the major spiritual ills plaguing contemporary Jewry, even within our relatively narrow circle of Orthodox Jewry. Many things upset us, as well they should, issues such as laxity in Shabbat and Kashrut observance, immodesty, dishonesty, Lashon Ha'ra, and so many others. We must remember that if we want to bring about change, the most powerful weapon in our arsenal is the personal example we set. We will not change the Jewish people by complaining and protesting. Change happens slowly and gradually, as a result of people seeing inspiring examples of proper conduct.

The Hebrew word for "influence" is "Hashpa'a," which comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for "incline" ("Shipu'a"). Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky (1891-1986) explained that influence works like drops of liquid trickling down an incline. It happens slowly and gradually. When we set a positive example through the way we conduct ourselves, we trigger a "trickle-down effect" which will, with time, have an impact. Going around criticizing and protesting will accomplish little, if anything, and, more often than not, will have the very opposite effect of what we want. If we want to have Hashpa'a, we need to have it "trickle down" by setting an example that we want the people around us to follow.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

**Will be distributed under a separate list
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Rabbi Wein

The Torah obviously envisions the creation within Jewish society of a special rite if not even elitist group of people - the kohanim, the priestly descendants of the family of Aharon. The existence of such a group within the ranks of Israel – a group that has laws exclusive to it alone and extra economic privileges - seems to fly in the face of all our current democratic ideals and societal fairness and equality. All humans are created equal and the same sets of laws should apply to all of them indiscriminately.

This mantra is currently subscribed to or at the very least, paid lip service to by "progressive" sections of human society. So, by current standards and accepted wisdom, the entire concept of kohanim seems to be an anachronistic one at best. And, it is interesting to me that this idea and grouping itself has lost none of its vitality in the Jewish world over the many millennia of our existence.

I knew a Jew who was a high ranking official in a very left-wing party here in Israel. He was not visibly observant of halacha or Jewish tradition and practice. It so happened that we were walking together to attend a funeral service for a mutual acquaintance of ours and as I was about to enter the funeral hall, he held back and refused to enter stating, quite definitively, "I am a kohein." That vestige of Judaism was simply something that he could not bring himself to discard. Apparently, once a kohein always a kohein.

An insight into this matter can be gleaned from the later description of the role of the kohein by the prophets of Israel. The kohein was charged with being the guardian of faith, the teachers of Torah, and the promoters of social peace and harmony. They were to be the good guys in a world where such people were often difficult to find.

It was this challenge that preserved their special identity throughout history. Every society requires people whose goal in life is to do good without harming others in the process. Other faiths have priestly classes that are devoted to seemingly doing good. However, almost without exception in history, doing good somehow always involved persecuting

and demeaning others. That was and is not the way of the children of Aharon.

The kohein was a role model and an example of what one should be and can be. His mere presence in society serves as a moderating influence on the mood and behavior of the public in general. Societies require people of altruism and permanent goodness. When one states that one is a kohein it is much more than a declaration of one's genealogy.

A GENERATION OF VICTIMS **Rabbi Yosef Farhi**

Several generations ago, psychology introduced us to a concept that changed humanity. A Freudian theory developed that adult mental ills were the result of damage done to the developing 'psyche' by parents who traumatized their children during critical stages of their early development. Ever since, parents and educators are blamed by their children and students for their own mistakes and failures throughout life. More and more people believe that they are victims of society or culture as well. It seems as if blame is laid on anyone and everyone in an attempt to help the sophisticated citizen of the 21st Century make peace with himself. In spite of this, history has never witnessed a generation as depressed as ours. In a recent survey, it was reported that more teenagers and young adults die from suicide than all other illnesses combined! Ceaseless efforts by parents and costly innovations by educators seem to be of no avail. Although concerned parents undergo parenting training and wade through endless pages on childrearing, results suggest that they are merely grinding water.

Somehow, even their carefully handled "fragile eggs" leave their parents in dismay. Seeing their perfect, cute little stars "tick off" in their teens like time-bombs can be more than frustrating. With tears of anguish and a choked voice, one such devoted mother blurted out: "It would have been easier for me to raise a Down's Syndrome child than to go through the nightmares I experienced with my teenager!" Is there any way out of this confusion, this veritable avalanche of 'responsibility shift'? Can there be a better approach than to buy another video game for our children, hot new car for our teenagers, or for us to take another exotic vacation? Looking at this week's Torah portion will give us a clearer picture of how G-d expects us to live.

There is a provocative episode at the end of our Parasha which can shed light on this question. The Ben Mitzri – the son of an Egyptian father and Jewish

mother – failed in his attempt to integrate into his mother's tribe of Dan. Since tribal affiliation is established through the father, Moshe's court ruled that this son of an Egyptian father could not qualify for membership in any tribe. Out of frustration, the rejected fellow committed the grave sin of cursing the Name of G-d (which he had heard at Mt. Sinai). For this, he was sentenced to stoning. His executioners were to be the very people who heard him utter the curse.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 45b) states that one who curses G-d is considered a kofer (heretic). In light of this, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz asks the following thought-provoking question: How could a Jew who witnessed G-d's revelation at Mt. Sinai, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the miraculous redemption from Egypt, suddenly fall from such a high level and act in a manner befitting an atheist?

The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

To understand how the Ben Mizri fell so far and so fast, we must examine the factors which coincided, bringing him to his demise. First, since he had an Egyptian father, the Ben Mitzri inherited a tendency to belittle G-d. We find this tendency in the terminology used by Pharaoh in his exchanges with Moshe (See Baalei Hatsofot). From his mother, he picked up another tendency which contributed to his undoing. Indeed, her name – Shlomit bat Divri – vividly reflected her actions. Shlomit: She would say Shalom to all passers-by, including unfamiliar men. Bat Divri: she was always chattering, and thereby projecting a flirtatious image of herself. Through her unconventional behavior, she called attention to herself, and the Egyptians perceived her as a harlot. Shlomit's extroverted behavior must have been a reflection of a deep thirst for social recognition and acceptance. This tendency or trait was picked up by her son who, like his mother, felt a strong need to connect and "belong" – not being able to "stand on his own two feet." Upon hearing the verdict of Moshe's court, he now felt rejected and dejected as never before.

Putting this all together, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains the abrupt fall to the lowest of low. When the Ben Mitzri felt rejected by society – he lost himself and acted upon his deep-seated tendency to belittle G-d. This grave sin was not excused in light of his upbringing and circumstances. Quite the contrary, he was to be reminded before being stoned to death: "You are liable for your actions!" (Rashi)

Responsible or Excusable?

Although many of us go through life convinced that our negative traits and tendencies are not in our control – that is actually a subconscious decision we

made or a belief that was drummed into us. Indeed, this faulty perception is nothing less than any other mistake that the Merciful G-d holds us accountable for, because He gave us a way to overcome our deficiencies. The key is to use the tool of bechira chofsheet (freedom of choice) which He entrusted to us. A Tzelem Elokim – one created in G-d's image - is never doomed to be a victim if he exercises his freedom of choice. Is there a more empowering concept than this? Ignorance of it may well be the biggest blunder of our generation.

Self-Esteem Is Not For Sale

Admittedly, self-esteem involves feeling good about oneself. Thus, parents with a child not keeping pace are faced with the challenge of how to foster his or her self-esteem. One possibility is to tell the child that given his capabilities (and/or learning disorders), his achievements are outstanding. Alternatively, parents can say: together, let us figure out ways to improve your studying, so that next time your mark will be slightly higher. The latter approach is undoubtedly more tedious and difficult. The first, however, practically puts success out of the child's range and, in a sense, casts doubt on G-d's ability or willingness to help the child. (Although "learning disorders" are real, of course, they are often used by teachers and parents as an excuse to abdicate their responsibility for helping the child realize his or her full potential.) Self-esteem is really more about believing in oneself than merely feeling good about oneself. In religious terms, it has an even deeper meaning: it means to believe in the Creator Who made all of us with limitations, and that each one of us is expected to overcome these limitation to the greatest extent possible.

Many well-intending parents try to create a bubble for a child with challenges. Not trusting that he can overcome the challenges, they portray the world in a way that the child feels good about himself. I recall how a certain mother would hop on the school bus and threaten the children who mocked her anti-social son. She obviously wanted to defend her boy by waving fingers at the naughty children, as if she were erasing them from existence. Those children might have learnt their lesson. But, unfortunately, her son never acquired social skills or tact, and suffered his whole life feeling that everyone else was to blame for his social problems.

Although these well-meaning parents are trying to give their children self-esteem, they are making a grave mistake. You can never really "give" someone lasting self-esteem. A person has to work hard on gaining belief in himself: only investing his own efforts

will foster self-motivation and eventually self-esteem. After the first accomplishment, he wants to go on to a bigger one. After facing the world successfully, the child will want to do it again. If you hide his face from the world, once he sees that his version of reality is mistaken, he will only want to bury his face in the ground.

This may explain the reason why many teenagers in our generation are "time bombs." Many teens that I come in contact with tell me that they never did anything in their entire life that they feel good about. They don't feel that they had their own "independent success story." Their successes usually resulted from a course of events where they were dependent on something or someone. The fact is that when kids succeed in overcoming difficulties, they experience an inner pride which makes them feel good about themselves. In contrast, unhappy kids have often never been in a healthy competitive environment where they could prove themselves to themselves.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks In the Diary

Time management is more than management and larger than time. It is about life itself. God gives us one thing above all: life itself. And He gives it to us all on equal terms. However rich we are, there are still only 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week, and a span of years that, however long, is still all too short. Whoever we are, whatever we do, whatever gifts we have, the single most important fact about our life, on which all else depends, is how we spend our time.[1]

"The span of our life is seventy years, or if we are strong, eighty years," says Psalm 90, and despite the massive reduction of premature deaths in the past century, the average life expectancy around the world, according to the most recent United Nations figures (2010-2015) is 71.5 years.[2] So, concludes the Psalm, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom," reminding us that time management is not simply a productivity tool. It is, in fact, a spiritual exercise.

Hence the following life-changing idea, which sounds simple, but isn't. Do not rely exclusively on To Do lists. Use a diary. The most successful people schedule their most important tasks in their diary.[3] They know that if it isn't in there, it won't get done. To Do lists are useful, but not sufficient. They remind us of what we have to do but not when. They fail to distinguish between what is important and what is merely urgent. They clutter the mind with trivia and distract us when we ought to be focusing on the

things that matter most in the long run. Only a diary connects what with when. And what applies to individuals applies to communities and cultures as a whole.

That is what the Jewish calendar is about. It is why chapter 23, in this week's parsha, is so fundamental to the continued vitality of the Jewish people. It sets out a weekly, monthly and yearly schedule of sacred times. This is continued and extended in Parshat Behar to seven- and fifty-year schedules. The Torah forces us to remember what contemporary culture regularly forgets: that our lives must have dedicated times when we focus on the things that give life a meaning. And because we are social animals, the most important times are the ones we share. The Jewish calendar is precisely that: a structure of shared time.

We all need an identity, and every identity comes with a story. So we need a time when we remind ourselves of the story of where we came from and why we are who we are. That happens on Pesach, when we re-enact the founding moment of our people as they began their long walk to freedom.

We need a moral code, an internalised satellite navigation system to guide us through the wilderness of time. That is what we celebrate on Shavuot when we relive the moment when our ancestors stood at Sinai, made their covenant with God, and heard Heaven declare the Ten Commandments.

We need a regular reminder of the brevity of life itself, and hence the need to use time wisely. That is what we do on Rosh Hashanah as we stand before God in judgment and pray to be written in the Book of Life.

We need a time when we confront our faults, apologise for the wrong we have done, make amends, resolve to change, and ask for forgiveness. That is the work of Yom Kippur.

We need to remind ourselves that we are on a journey, that we are "strangers and sojourners" on earth, and that where we live is only a temporary dwelling. That is what we experience on Succot.

And we need, from time to time, to step back from the ceaseless pressures of work and find the rest in which we can celebrate our blessings, renew our relationships, and recover the full vigour of body and mind. That is Shabbat.

Doubtless, most people – at least, most reflective people – know that these things are important. But knowing is not enough. These are elements of a life

that become real when we live them, not just when we know them. That is why they have to be in the diary, not just on a To Do list.

As Alain de Botton points out in his Religion for Atheists, we all know that it is important to mend broken relationships. But without Yom Kippur, there are psychological pressures that can make us endlessly delay such mending.[4] If we are the offended party, we may not want to show other people our hurt. It makes us look fragile, vulnerable. And if we are the offending party, it can be hard to admit our guilt, not least because we feel so guilty. As he puts it: "We can be so sorry that we find ourselves incapable of saying sorry." The fact that Yom Kippur exists means that there is a day in the diary on which we have to do the mending – and this is made easier by the knowledge that everyone else is doing so likewise. In his words:

It is the day itself that is making us sit here and talk about the peculiar incident six months ago when you lied and I blustered and you accused me of insincerity and I made you cry, an incident that neither of us can quite forget but that we can't quite mention either and which has been slowly corroding the trust and love we once had for one another. It is the day that has given us the opportunity, indeed the responsibility, to stop talking of our usual business and to reopen a case we pretended to have put out of our minds. We are not satisfying ourselves, we are obeying the rules.[5]

Exactly so: we are obeying the rules. We are following the Jewish calendar, which takes many of the most important truths about our lives and, instead of putting them on a To Do list, writes them in the diary.

What happens when you do not have that kind of diary? Contemporary Western secular society is a case-study in the consequences. People no longer tell the story of the nation. Hence national identities, especially in Europe, are almost a thing of the past – one reason for the return of the Far Right in countries like Austria, Holland and France.

People no longer share a moral code, which is why students in universities seek to ban speakers with whose views they disagree. When there is no shared code, there can be no reasoned argument, only the use of force.

As for remembering the brevity of life, Roman Krznaric reminds us that modern society is "geared to distract us from death. Advertising creates a world where everyone is forever young. We shunt the

elderly away in care homes, out of sight and mind.” Death has become “a topic as taboo as sex was during the Victorian era.”[6]

Atonement and forgiveness have been driven out of public life, to be replaced by public shaming, courtesy of the social media. As for Shabbat, almost everywhere in the West the day of rest has been replaced by the sacred day of shopping, and rest itself replaced by the relentless tyranny of smartphones.

Fifty years ago, the most widespread prediction was that by now almost everything would have been automated. The work week would be down to 20 hours and our biggest problem would be what to do with all our leisure. Instead, most people today find themselves working harder than ever with less and less time to pursue the things that make life meaningful. As Leon Kass recently put it, people “still hope to find meaning in their lives,” but they are increasingly confused about “what a worthy life might look like, and about how they might be able to live one.”[7]

Hence the life-changing magic of the Jewish calendar. Philosophy seeks timeless truths. Judaism, by contrast, takes truths and translates them into time in the form of sacred, shared moments when we experience the great truths by living them. So: whatever you want to achieve, write it in the diary or it will not happen. And live by the Jewish calendar if you want to experience, not just occasionally think about, the things that give life a meaning.

[1] For an excellent recent book about the way our behaviour is governed by time, see Daniel Pink, *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*, Riverhead Books, 2018.

[2]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_life_expectancy.

[3] See Kevin Kruse, *15 Secrets Successful People Know about Time Management*, 2017.

[4] Of course, Yom Kippur atones only for sins between us and God, not for those between us and our fellows. But it is a day when, traditionally, we seek to make amends for the latter also. Indeed most of the sins we confess in the long list, *Al Cheit*, are sins between humans and other humans.

[5] Alain De Botton, *Religion for Atheists*, Hamish Hamilton, 2012, 55 – 56.

[6] Roman Krznaric, *Carpe Diem Regained*, Unbound, 2017, 22.

[7] Leon Kass, *Leading a Worthy Life: Finding Meaning in Modern Times*, Encounter Books, 2018, 9.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL “For your favor” (23:11)

The acts which cause us to become more aware of Hashem are acts that gain for us Hashem’s favor. The waiving of the Omer before Hashem is intended for the purpose of declaring that Hashem bestowed

the grain, and that the grain is a miraculous substance, which elicits our amazement and admiration. If we respond properly to this declaration, and we recognize the wondrous process of the growth of the grain and we perceive the vastness of the miracles which the grain performs when we ingest it, the grain thereby becomes the great demonstration of Hashem’s infinite wisdom and power and kindness. When men learn these lessons they thus fulfill the purpose for which they were created, and thus they deserve Hashem’s favor.

The intention of gaining Hashem’s favor should be emphasized and should be kept in mind while doing any Mitzvah and even any ordinary act. But “A man’s food is more difficult (meaning: more miraculous) than the rending of the Sea of Suf” (Pesachim 118A).

The sunlight travels 93 million miles to aid the plant-chlorophyll to convert the carbon dioxide of the air into starch. The sun evaporates the surface of the sea and the vapor rises to the clouds, where the winds sweep the clouds inland to be condensed and to fall as rain to nourish the grain. Every grain kernel possesses some millions of bits of information recorded on the helix of the DNA molecule with instructions how to produce the plant and how the plant should function to produce the grain. As the materials from the atmosphere and from the soil pass into the plant and are processed, thousands of complicated steps must be performed in precise sequence so that the final result is achieved. But the truth of the intricacy of the production of food is vastly more complicated and purposeful than men will ever know.

The waiving of the Omer is a declaration of our endless gratitude and wonderment and admiration for the work of him that “gives bread to all flesh, for his kindness is everlasting” (Tehillim 136:25). Hashem created these miracles of Kindliness in order that men should recognize Him. Therefore the waiving of the Omer to aggrandize and praise the gift of food is certainly deserving of Hashem’s favor. “And he shall waive the Omer ...for your favor.”

Thus the appreciation of food is a major means of gaining Hashem’s favor. That is the reason that Birkat Hamazon is the sole blessing that is unanimously recognized as an original Torah obligation (based on the verse in Devarim 8:10).

Quoted from “A Kingdom of Cohanim” by Rabbi Miller ZT’L