

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TESSE

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 54:1-10

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**DEDICATION: LeZecher Nishmat George Benson, Gedalyah Shlomo Ben Baruch Tzvi z"l
And in memory of Yosef Ovadiah Bibi – 19 Elul**

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EDITORS NOTES

Over the course of the last 25 years or so in producing this newsletter, we've had the opportunity to make pen pals across the world. And connecting is a wonderful thing. This week's newsletter is dedicated by a long time reader and annual sponsor Mr. Stu Benson. I would like to share what he wrote to me this week. He asked to credit Rabbi Moshe Meyer Weiss as he was the original source. Hearing about his dad, I would have loved to have met him and think how amazing every synagogue would be if there was someone to emulate him. Rabbi Abittan would tell us that one of the most damaging blockages is caused by sadness and depression. In our daily Amidah after the work Yagon (sadness) we see in parenthesis that this is the Satan and after the work Anacha (depression) we see in parenthesis Satan's so to say female counterpart. Their goal is to disconnect and they are driven away through joy which reconnects.

In past years, I mentioned to you that my father was the candy-man of his shul, the Young Israel of Hillcrest – and that he sweetened the lives of others. However, I never felt that the 'candy-man' label gives my father proper recognition. My father was not your typical candy-man. And since this is the 10th yearzeit of his passing, and I recently heard a related bit of Torah, with your permission I would like to share with you a little more information about the type of candy-man that my father was.

In the parsha Ki Tabo, which we read next week, the Torah discusses the declaration that a person makes when he brings his first fruits. As part of the declaration, the farmer states 'Asiti K'Chol Asher Tzivitani' – I did all that you commanded me. Rashi comments on this- what did he do: 'Samachti Ve'simachti Bo' – I rejoiced, and I caused others to rejoice.

I heard a beautiful explanation that I think very much relates to my father. Rav Pam says the juxtaposition between 'I rejoiced' and 'I caused others to rejoice' is that in the same way that when I enjoyed my bounty I was happy, I was also happy when I shared and gave to others. This was my father. My father was a man that had happiness in making people happy.

On Shabbat and Yom Tov my father davened at the Haskama minyan which was at 7:30AM. Although my father was of limited means, he came to minyan with a whole selection of candies – on Shabbat, Yom Tov and during the week. If he knew you liked a candy, he made sure to have it. Once when someone declined my father's offer for a candy because he was diabetic, the following week my father made sure to have sugar free candy.

But that was not all. My father also had a whole new take on preparing for prayer. You see, every Shabbat and Yom Tov after dinner, my father would take out his candies and make individual packages. And this was no simple task considering the variety of candies he gave away. M&Ms Plain and Peanut, all types of Hershey's and Nestlé's with and without nuts, Snickers, Milky Ways, 3 Musketeers, Sunkist Gems, sucking candies in all flavors, including butterscotch (and sugar free).

He knew which candies each person liked, and he would come to shul early and on your chair in the morning was a customized package of your special candies. No matter what mood you were in before you came to your seat, seeing your special package waiting for you had to put you in the proper mood for tefillah. And seeing how happy his 'customers' were, made my father very happy.

lvdu es Hashem Bisimcha, Bo'u Lifanav Birnana – Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song'. Somehow my father found a way not only to prepare himself for tefillah, but at the same time to prepare others.

My father so enjoyed making people happy that he would give candy everywhere he went, and it mattered not their station in life, – to thank the person who pumped his gas (back I those days...), to the doctors, nurses, technicians, receptionists, (and even Dr. Rabbi Abittan himself).

I could go on about my father but maybe that is for another time.

As we approach the Yamim Noraim, I try to remember to appreciate even more all that Hashem has blessed me to have and to share my blessings with others Besimcha.

Following on Stuart's words, I would like to share what I wrote some years back as it relates to joy especially as we approach Rosh Hashana.

In a few weeks, we will read the words, Atem Nesavim HaYom.

We always read this portion right before Rosh Hashana. You are standing here today. This can mean that after hearing the Tochacha – the 98 curses the previous week (actually next week), Moses is telling the people not to worry, you are all still standing here. Or perhaps it's a warning to us; reminding us that we are at the Day of Judgment where we are standing before the Heavenly Judge's bench. If that's the case, what can we do to help win the case?

A couple of years ago, I was out shopping in the days before Rosh Hashana when I noticed two yeshiva boys in their suits and white shirts with their mom. The mother pulled a set of small bowls off a shelf into her wagon and one boy asked why they would need such small bowls. The mother responded that they would be good for the simanim - the special foods we serve on the night of Rosh Hashana.

The other boy laughed and asked, "Ma, what do you think? That this is Pesach? Ma, it's not the Seder! Why such a big deal over some foods that we don't want to eat anyway? Do you really think it matters?"

I couldn't mind my own business. The mother was a bit aggravated. She went one way and the boys went the other way. So I went over to speak with them.

The truth is that their question is very valid. Just imagine for a second getting a speeding ticket in some small town in upstate New York or New Jersey. You arrive at this small town court. The cop who wrote you the ticket is there and the judge asks you how you plead. You try some guilty with explanation excuse and then the judge cuts you short, asks the cop a few questions and tells you if you're done he will decide the verdict.

Try telling it to the Judge

You tell him to wait one more minute. You pull out from your bag a jar of honey and some sliced apple and as you dip the apple into the honey you state aloud, may it be the will of your honor the judge to sweeten my verdict just like this honey sweetens the apple and you eat the apple, relishing each bite in front of the court.

Odds are that the judge will either throw you into a cell for a few hours charging you with contempt or ask that you be taken to the local hospital for observation.

Rosh Hashana is supposed to be the day of judgment. And as we learned in school as children, G-d takes out the scale. On one side go our sins and on the other go our merits. If we are worthy, we are judged positively and if not then we're in for some trouble.

How can eating a pomegranate or some blacked eyed peas increase our merits? How can eating a gourd or some dates help destroy our enemies? How can an apple in honey sweeten out judgments? How is it possible through these foods to change sins into merits? What's going on here?

Is There Such a Thing as a Good Omen?

Is there such a thing as a good omen? And on Rosh Hashana is it the food or the prayer? And if it's the prayer then why do we need the food?

The Talmud tells us about omens. If someone wants to know if they will be judged for life then on the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur he should light a candle in a draft free room. If the candles burns then fine, if the candle goes out, he better get some more life insurance quickly.

If he wants to know if he will merit a good parnasa or livelihood, he should take a chicken. He should feed it and if after a while it gains weight than all is good. But if it loses weight, he should get on the phone and call the bankruptcy attorney because tough times are ahead. And there are more.

The Talmud then warns not to try any of these at home. "Perhaps he will not see it and worry and as a result he will experience misfortune".

A Reason to Be More Confused

Then Abaye goes on to say that what does work is eating pumpkin, fenugreek, leeks, beets and dates. These are good omens. He doesn't mention any yehi ratzons, nor prayers. Eat those foods he suggests. And if you were confused when we started, you should be even more puzzled now. How can we begin to understand what is going on here?

The Arizal suggests that the person who lit the candle and sees the candle go out goes into depression. Perhaps the "Satan" blew it out just to mess with your mind. Sadness is a tool of the other side as it disconnects us from Hashem. Recall our forefather Jacob who in mourning for the loss of Joseph for 22 years lost his Ruach HaKodesh – his connection with G-d. Abaye in his brilliance suggests that if depression can disconnect us and damage our Mazal then joy can do the opposite. And these special foods should bring us joy.

In Parashat Ki Tavo we read of 98 chilling curses. Why are we subject to curses? The Torah tells us it's because we didn't serve Hashem with joy and a good heart. We are commanded again and again to be happy and to serve Hashem with joy.

These foods which make up the simanim of Rosh Hashana can be sweet but sometimes sour. If we taste them and appreciate them; If we taste the sweetness and forget the tart; If we are thankful of the world G-d gave us and are happy with Hashem then Hashem is happy with us. If we are satisfied and happy then there is no place for sadness, anger or jealousy. Satisfaction and joy have the power to change us and change our lives.

The Benefits of Regarding Hashem as Our Father

If we are happy with Hashem and look at him as a father then Hashem will look at us as his children. A child who does something wrong and comes to his parent admitting his sin, feeling bad not only for doing something wrong but for embarrassing his parent and truly tries to never do the same wrong again in essence converts the sin into a merit. The father cherishes the child and the entire act becomes part of a victory tale.

On Rosh Hashana, Hashem's behavior towards us mirrors our own behavior. If we are happy with the world and satisfied; If we share and care; If we look towards G-d as a parent, then he looks at us as a child.

The Power to Change Our Mazal

Eating those foods, appreciating them, being satisfied with them and enjoying them really has the power to change our Mazal. We really can turn a sin into a merit. They have the power to change the scale by literally converting the sins on the left side of the scale into merits on the right side.

The key lies in our own hands. The key lies in our own attitudes. On this Rosh Hashana as you sit with your family and taste these foods stop and smell the proverbial roses. Go around the table and ask everyone to focus on what they have to be

thankful for. Focus on the glass half full. Commit to being satisfied and fighting jealousy and anger.

Don't forget that what we project finds its way back to us. May we project love and unity, satisfaction and appreciation, and may we be blessed with a year of health, happiness, peace and prosperity. Amen!

Tizku LeShanim Rabot

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Popular learning topics for the 40 days between Elul and Yom Kippur. Even 5 minutes a day can really help us get in the right mind frame for the holidays

- 1- Tomer Devorah – Learn about the 13 midot and how to treat people better - We all need this
- 2- Hovot Halevaot – Many people learn the chapter dealing with Heshbon Ha'nefesh (Self-accounting)
- 3- Rambam Hilchot Teshuva
- 4- Shaarey Teshuva

*You can call Eichler's to order one of these books. 718-258-7643. They all come in English as well.
**You can search for classes on these books at learnTorah.com or Torahanytime.com

Also, now is a good time to start thinking about what would like to take on for this coming year. It takes a while to figure out what we want to work on so it is good to start thinking about it a little in advance.

Ki Teseh - 74 mitsvot that largely deal with relationships and sensitivity towards others

- 1- A soldier who desires a woman in war, the hated wife, the wayward son
- 2- Various mitsvot including returning a lost item and sending away the mother bird
- 3- Forbidden mixtures, cases of forbidden relations
- 4- Holiness of the Jewish camp, prostitution, interest, keeping vows
- 5- Laws of givin (divorce)
- 6- Mitsvot largely dealing with what lenders can take as collateral
- 7- Various mitsvot including paying workers on time, sensitivity toward the convert and orphan, leket shicheha pe'ah, yibum and halitsah, honesty in business, remembering Amalek.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“When you come into the vineyard of your friend you may eat grapes.” (Debarim 23:25)

Our parashah discusses the law of a worker who is working in the vineyard. He has permission to eat grapes while he is working. However, he is not permitted to place the grapes into a utensil. He may only eat with his hands.

This reminds me of a time when I was in a local supermarket. While I was there I noticed a man who took a peach and ate it. After he finished the peach he took a nectarine and ate that also. He was eating every fruit there, and as you know, the price of fruit is pretty high. If not for supermarket-rage (a form of road-rage), I was considering telling him that this is considered stealing. The Torah permits a worker to eat, not a shopper.

There is an interesting detail to this law. The Rabbis point out that he can eat while he is working. Even during the time that he walks from one ridge to another in order to gather the produce, that “walking” is also considered like working.

This teaches us that when a Jew wakes up in the morning and dedicates his day to serving Hashem, even the time he is involved in business dealings in order to support his family is also considered part of serving Hashem, as the purpose of his work is so he can have the food and resources to serve Hashem. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The Torah teaches that no man from the nations of Amon or Moab will ever be permitted to convert and join the Jewish nation. The reason given is that, when Bnei Yisrael were traveling in the desert, these nations did not offer us bread and water. At first glance, it might seem that the punishment is far more severe than the crime. In contrast, an Egyptian, whose nation enslaved us for 210 years, is permitted to convert and become a Jew. Why is the Egyptian accepted, while Amon and Moab are rejected?

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian explains that this is not a punishment. Rather, the reason they are rejected is because they lack a fundamental trait that every Jew must have – the trait of hakarat hatob, appreciating the good that is done for him. The nations of Amon and Moav were descendants of Lot. When Hashem told Abraham he was going to destroy the city of Sedom, Abraham prayed for Lot to be saved, so these nations actually owed their entire existence to Abraham. By failing to appreciate this, they disqualified themselves from becoming Jews, because as the gemara says, one who does not have hakarat hatob for the goodness that his fellow man does for him will ultimately fail to even recognize and acknowledge the kindnesses that Hashem does

for him. Such a person cannot possibly live his life the way a Jew should live his life.

There are many people who have helped us in our lifetime - our parents and extended family, our friends, our Rabbis and teachers. Every now and then, we should take a moment and reflect on the many things that others have done for us and continue to do for us, and whenever possible, express our gratitude to them. And of course we should also think about the countless acts of hesed that Hashem does for us every minute of our lives. This is such a crucial aspect of our religion that only someone who has this trait of hakarat hatob is qualified to become a member of the Jewish nation. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Extra Protection

“An Amonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem...Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water...and because they hired Bilaam ...to curse you.”

The Torah clearly presents two reasons for banning an Amonite or a Moabite from marrying a Jew. Rashi, however, cites only their procuring Bilaam to effect our spiritual destruction as grounds for their exclusion. Why does Rashi omit their lack of character refinement as motive for barring them from Klal Yisrael? Rav Elyakim Schlesinger responds to this question by first addressing a similar question regarding the death of Lot's wife.

When Lot and his family were escaping the inferno which destroyed Sedom, his wife disobeyed the command not to look back. Consequently, she was turned into a pillar of salt. Rashi explains that her punishment was specific; it was a direct result of her refusal to serve salt, a simple condiment, to her guests. Such a punishment seems overly harsh and inconsistent with the transgression. Rav Schlesinger suggests that her insensitive treatment of her guests was not the reason for her death. Every transgression has a specific retribution consistent to the degree of its gravity.

The performance of certain misvot and various good deeds serve as a safeguard against punishment. Thus, retribution can be averted through the earned merit of misvot. Lot's wife was destined to perish and be transformed into a pillar of salt because of her violation of the angel's command. Had she had the merit of treating her guests decently by serving them properly, being sensitive to their simple needs, she would have been spared punishment. Her lack of sensitivity to others sealed her fate, but was not the actual rationale for her punishment.

Similarly, the Amonite and Moabite people deserved severe sanctions as a result of their attempts to catalyze the spiritual downfall of our

people. Had they shown some human decency when we were in need, they might have been spared. Their continued lack of character refinement sealed their ultimate doom.

We may derive from here that one should be meticulous in observing all misvot regardless of their apparent level of significance. We do not know by virtue of which misvah or good deed our deserved punishment has been mitigated or even reprieved. (Peninim on the Torah)

The Human Alarm Clock

"Before the break of dawn, the rooster has an understanding that it will soon be light, and he crows to announce that a new day is about to begin. The crowing of a rooster was once used as an alarm clock. Only Hashem gave the rooster this wisdom of intuition.

Intuition is a built-in trait gifted to us by Hashem. It is an Alarm Clock planted in our brains to help us distinguish right from wrong. (Norman D. Levy; Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Yeser Hara Strikes When Man is Distracted: Eshet Yefat Toar

This week's parasha, Parashat Ki Teseh, discusses a very difficult halacha: the law of eshet yefat toar. The Torah describes the Jewish soldier who goes out to war and desires a non-Jewish woman. He is permitted to have a sexual encounter with her, but must then bring her home, and if they wish to be married, he must convert to.

Why does the Torah allow the soldier to have relations with this non-Jewish woman? The Torah usually demands restraint. Why in this case is the soldier permitted to succumb to his yeser hara?

In previous years, we discussed the interpretation of the Or Hahaim Hakadosh, which exemplifies the depth with which the Torah must be studied to avoid reaching incorrect conclusions. He explains that the soldiers who went out to war were righteous and holy sadikim, and thus when one of them felt attracted to a captive woman, there was good reason to suspect that this was due not to her physical appearance, but rather because of the spark within her soul. If indeed, this woman had such a holy spark within her, he was encouraged to convert and marry her. Before he did so, however, he was required to first ascertain that his feelings of attraction were indeed spiritual, and not physical. The soldier would therefore bring the woman to her home and spoil her attractive appearance. If he still experienced desire for her,

then it could be assumed that he was drawn to the spark within her soul, and he would thus marry her.

This year, I would like to make another point. The simple understanding of this parasha is that the yeser hara, the evil inclination, is relentless, and its most successful tactic is to prevent a man from thinking. Men and women run from place to place, without ever thinking about why they were created. If a person would stop and think, 'why did God create me,' he would conclude that he was created to serve God. And eventually, he will realize that he must follow the manual, the Torah, which offers us instructions for life. Just like every machine comes with an instruction manual, so too, man was created, and was given an instruction manual- the Torah.

This life is a vestibule; it is a bridge between this world and the next. People are not supposed to stop on a bridge. The only way to get to eternity is through this world. However, people treat this world, the bridge, as if it is an eternity. Those who do not prepare in this world will not pass through the corridor into the next world.

The soldier who went out to war is completely focused on fighting. He is unable to think about other issues. God says that in this case, since he is completely pre-occupied, God does not hold him responsible, and he is given permission to have relations with her, and then decide whether they are to be married. It is from this unique halachic dispensation that we learn a very important lesson about the strength of the yeser hara.

VICTOR BIBI

SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein

Over the span of the millennia of recorded history it is obvious to note that governments of old always either opposed or corrupted religious beliefs for their own benefit or to make religion conform to the politically correct ideas and norms of a time. In the ancient world, governments relied on paganism to strengthen their hold on the people and to create tyrannies.

The Roman emperors felt compelled to proclaim themselves gods to guarantee the obedience of the masses to their policies, laws and rules. The half mad Roman Emperor Caligula even had his horse proclaimed a god by the Roman Senate. It was the power of government in the Roman and Byzantine

empires that Christianized Europe by force, having to use very little intellectual convincing on a mainly illiterate population.

Throughout the Middle Ages the contest always was between the authority of government and kings, at odds with the authority of religious beliefs and practices. In effect, it was the government that told its hapless subjects what to believe and how to believe and the unholy alliance between church and state became the norm in Western society as it was in the Moslem world as well.

As the Enlightenment took hold in Western Europe, the power of the church and religion generally was severely weakened, and government moved in to fill the vacuum. Ironically, governments such as France and even the United States declared themselves to be countries where church and state would be separated and where religion would have only moral sway but no temporal power to enforce its beliefs.

As Western civilization became more and more irreligious and as secularism became the dominant intellectual force, governments became increasingly less tolerant of religion itself. Governments felt, and until today feel a compulsion to oppose religious beliefs and practices, to legislate against them and to enforce decrees intended to make observance of religious practices more difficult.

All of this is naturally done in the name of progress, equality and other high- sounding words and phrases. But the bottom line is that it ends up being a dictatorship over what people can believe and practice. By enforcing rules – such as gender equality – and carrying these rules to an extreme – same-sex bathrooms and a refusal to identify a newborn infant as being male or female, the heavy hand of government stifles religious expression and beliefs.

The power of government is so enormous that it can and does govern every aspect of the life of its citizens and creates an atmosphere where it is difficult, in the extreme, to maintain religious beliefs and traditional practices. The Soviet Union enforced atheism as the early national belief of its millions of citizens and did so by actively and purposely destroying the infrastructure and leadership of religion in that country.

In the United States and in Israel the arbiters of what religious expression is to be allowed in society rests with the powers of the unelected members of the Supreme Court. Fierce debate regarding the existence of a constitutionally protected right to abort a living fetus rages without end for the last 70 years,

as religious beliefs and governmental policies clash one with the other. And this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Despite their apparent power, history has taught us that governments come and go. What is accepted as social policy in one generation may be determined to be a criminal activity in another generation. Though religion also experiences change and social evolution it does so slowly and in a very conservative manner. As such, it provides stability to the social environment that would otherwise sway radically from one extreme to another.

If government would truly be neutral regarding religion, then it would not be viewed as an enemy of religion and religious practices. However, since governments in the Western world and at certain times here in Israel as well, are hardly neutral in religious matters, the tension between government and religion remains high and volatile. No one should advocate a theocracy, for history has shown us that this creates an unworkable situation and a dysfunctional nation, witness Iran, Saudi Arabia and other such states. However, governments should really stay out of advancing policies that diminish and weaken the religious beliefs and systems that function in their societies.

A great deal of wisdom is required to achieve the necessary balance between religion and government. But we all know that wisdom most times is at a shortage. Nevertheless, this problem should be realized and considered before governments adopt policies that are so inimical to religious beliefs and norms

Rabbi Yosef Farhi

Teshuva for the Orthodox Jew is usually more about quality than about quantity. For the Orthodox, Teshuva is more about improving how you do what you do more than it is changing what you do. *But Rabbi, my plate is too full! I am doing too much already! I do not have more time/energy/money/headspace to do more! I am maxed out!*

Teshuva is not about *doing* more. It is about *being* different. It is not about the *what*. It is about the *how*. Improving on the *how* in G-d's service is not an investment of time/energy/money/headspace as much as it is one of emotional intelligence. About being in total control of your emotions. What you focus on. What state of mind you are in. No matter how much you did or you are doing. Let me give three examples.

In Eshet Chayil, we sing, גְּדִיהָ שְׁלָחָה בְּפִישׁוֹר, Her hand she sent to the spike. Who is this referring to? To Yael. Yael did not kill Sisra with a sword. As it says תִּגְדֶּה לַיָּגֵד תִּשְׁלַחֲכֶנָּה

her hand she sent to the spike (or tent peg). (Shoftim 5 26) And why did Yael kill Sisra with the tent peg and not with the sword? Because in the Torah, (in our Parasha) it says, לאִיִּתְּיָהּ כְּלֵי־יָגֶר עַל־אִשָּׁה A woman should not bear masculine accessories. (Yalkut Shoftim 5, 56)

Yael saved the Jewish Nation at war from the evil general, Sisrah. G-d performed a miracle at the war, and the 900 iron chariots of Sisra got flooded in the valley during the miraculous thunderstorm. Sisrah fled to hide out in the tent of Yael, the wife of Heber Hakeni, Sisra's friend. She then slept with him 7 times, to make him weak. (R' Akiva was a descendant of the third relationship. Rama Mipano) Yael offered him some milk, to make him sleepy. And then, she took the tent peg to kill him. She did not use Sisra's sword. She was allowed to do what she did with him based on three factors. A. She was saving the entire Jewish people, B. He was a non-Jew, and C. She had no pleasure from sinning with him. *But she did not need to use a sword.* Using a sword is forbidden, as war is a masculine occupation. It is forbidden for a woman to wear armor, as armor is considered to be exclusively masculine. (Nazir 59a, see Rashi. Also, Shu" A YD 182;5) So, she used the wooden tent peg, instead.

Why was this small element of Yael's superhuman act worthy of such a great amount of attention? Because Yael kept her cool in serving G-d to the max at the time of an emotional whirlpool. Despite the fact that she was allowed to transgress the laws in order to save the Jewish Nation, she was able to minimize those permitted transgressions. It was the same superhuman act. But her finesse in the how, in choosing to use the wooden tent peg was what got her into the Eishet Chayil Hall of Fame. יָדֵיהָ שְׁלָחָהּ בַּכִּישׁוֹר.

We are all at war. An internal war against our Evil Inclination. In this war to do the right thing, our ability to control our emotions, to perform at our best in the 613, makes all the difference. And it is the small things that count. *If Yehonatan, son of King Saul, would have offered David just two loaves of bread, when David was fleeing from K. Saul, he would have circumvented all the tragedies that followed. The Kohanim in the city of Nov would not have been killed, and Doeg would not have been lost, and Shaul and his three sons would not have died.*" (Sanhedrin 104a) Despite the everlasting love that Yehonatan had for David, his willingness to give up his rights to the throne to David and even to risk his life for David... still. The Torah holds him responsible for not offering David two loaves of bread for the road. It is the small things that count. It is the small things that make all the difference. A drop more consideration. A drop more awareness. A drop more Kavannah.

There were seven prophetesses, *Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Chanah, Avigail, Hulda, and Esther.* (Megillah 14a) Deborah lived in the time of Yael. How did Deborah become a prophetess, and merit being the author of one of the Ten Songs of Tanach? The Yalkut Shimon hints to the answer in his words.

Although Eliyah Hanavi was present at the time, Deborah became the prophetess and the Judge of the Jewish Nation. G-d promises us, and testifies by the heavens and the earth, that both a gentile and a Jew, a man or a woman, a slave or a maidservant can have Ruach Hakodesh. Bestowing Ruach Hakodesh is dependent upon a person's actions.

What was so special of Deborah's actions that she deserved Ruach Hakodesh? She is known for being the wife of Lapidot. Her husband was a simpleton. But she wanted him to have a portion in Torah learning. Deborah donated the wicks for the Mishkan in Shiloh, and she would make them, and send her husband to the study hall, so that he would be a part of the righteous and merit Olam Haba.

What? From making wicks she became a prophetess? That's all you need to do to achieve Ruach Hakodesh?!

Eliyahu the Prophet teaches us Deborah's secret. She was מַתְּבוֹנָה, she focused on making the wicks to be especially thick wicks, to bring about the most light in the Mishkan of Shiloh and the study hall there. G-d sees the intentions of the heart, and He said to her, Deborah, you intended Me to have a lot of light. So too, said G-d, that He would make Deborah's light spread throughout Yehuda and Jerusalem. (Y Shimon Shoftim 42)

It was Deborah's *focusing*, not to make just *any* wicks. Not even her making the *thick* wicks. But it was her *concentrating* all her efforts on serving G-d. It was her complete dedication to making the wicks, specifically in such a way as to serve G-d to the max. The focusing, the intensity of devotion, is what made her different. The how. G-d wants quality. So, what do we need to focus on? Here is the trick. Listen closely, because if you cross the wires, you can blow your battery.

The 613 are divided into 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. The service of G-d, of the heart, is split into two. Fear of G-d and Love of G-d. If you want to improve your *positive commandments*, i.e. learning Torah, Birkat Hamazon, Tzizit, Tefillin, honoring parents, your best bet is to focus on upgrading the quality by adding LOVE of G-d into those acts. (See Ramban, Yitro) If you try to keep the positive commandments by adding FEAR of G-d, you will burn your battery. FEAR is reserved for the negative commandments, like not speaking lashon hara, not mixing meat and milk, not desecrating Shabbat, etc. To improve on the quality, we need to add LOVE to the positive commandments, and FEAR to the negative commandments.

Even in the realm of the material, studies and experience in all life areas teach us, quality over quantity. To manage your time to the max, it is not how many things you cram in, but accomplishing your most important tasks first, "Important over Urgent". In learning, it is not about amassing knowledge (quantity), but about attaining wisdom (quality). Knowledge comes and goes, but wisdom lingers. With family and friends, quality time has more

value than quantity time. In dieting, you need to increase the quality of what you eat, not just reduce the quantity. And in serving G-d, as well. לְמַהֲלֵי רַב־זְבָחֶיכֶם יֵאמָר יְקֹוֹק. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me, says G-d?* (Yeshaya 1; 11) G-d wants from us quality over quantity.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Social Capital & Fallen Donkeys

Many years ago, Elaine and I were being driven to the Catskills, a long-time favourite summer getaway for Jews in New York, and our driver told us the following story: One Friday afternoon, he was making his way to join his family in the Catskills for Shabbat when he saw a man wearing a yarmulke, bending over his car at the side of the road. One of the tires was flat, and he was about to change the wheel.

Our driver told us that he pulled over to the roadside, went over to the man, helped him change the wheel, and wished him “Good Shabbos.” The man thanked him, took his yarmulke off and put it in his pocket. Our driver must have given him a quizzical look, because the man turned and explained: “Oh, I’m not Jewish. It’s just that I know that if I’m wearing one of these” – he gestured to the yarmulke – “someone Jewish will stop and come to help me.”

I mention this story because of its obvious relevance to the command in today’s parsha: “Do not see your kinsman’s donkey or his ox fallen on the road and ignore it. Help him lift it up” (Deut. 22:4). On the face of it, this is one tiny detail in a parsha full of commands. But its real significance lies in telling us what a covenant society should look like. It is a place where people are good neighbours, and are willing to help even a stranger in distress. Its citizens care about the welfare of others. When they see someone in need of help, they don’t walk on by.

The sages debated the precise logic of the command. Some held that it is motivated by concern for the welfare of the animal involved, the ox or the donkey, and that accordingly tsa’ar ba’alei hayyim, prevention of suffering to animals, is a biblical command.[1] Others, notably the Rambam, held that it had to do with the welfare of the animal’s owner, who might be so distressed that he came to stay with the animal at a risk to his own safety[2] – the keyword here being “on the road.” The roadside in ancient times was a place of danger.

Equally the sages discussed the precise relationship between this command and the similar but different one in Exodus (23:5): “If you see your enemy’s donkey fallen under its load, do not pass by. Help him

load it.” They said that, all other things being equal, if there is a choice between helping an enemy and helping a friend, helping an enemy takes precedence since it may “overcome the inclination”, that is, it may help end the animosity and turn an enemy into a friend.[3] This, the ethic of “help your enemy” is a principle that works, unlike the ethic of “love your enemy” which has never worked and has led to some truly tragic histories of hate.

In general, as the Rambam states, one should do for someone you find in distress what you would do for yourself in a similar situation. Better still, one should put aside all considerations of honour and go “beyond the limit of the law.” Even a prince, he says, should help the lowliest commoner, even if the circumstances do not accord with the dignity of his office or his personal standing.[4]

All of this is part of what sociologists nowadays call social capital: the wealth that has nothing to do with money and everything to do with the level of trust within a society – the knowledge that you are surrounded by people who have your welfare at heart, who will return your lost property (see the lines immediately prior to the fallen donkey: Deut. 22:1-3), who will raise the alarm if someone is breaking into your house or car, who will keep an eye on the safety of your children, and who generally contribute to a “good neighbourhood,” itself an essential component of a good society.

The man who has done more than anyone else to chart the fate of social capital in modern times is Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam. In a famous article, ‘Bowling Alone’ and subsequent book of the same title,[5] he drew attention to the sharp loss of social capital in modern times. It was symbolised by the fact that more people than ever were going ten-pin bowling, but fewer than ever were joining bowling teams: hence ‘bowling alone,’ which seemed to epitomise the individualism of contemporary society and its corollary: loneliness.

Ten years later, in an equally fascinating study, American Grace,[6] he argued that in fact social capital was alive and well in the United States, but in specific locations, namely religious communities: places of worship that still bring people together in shared belonging and mutual responsibility.

His extensive research, carried out throughout the United States between 2004 and 2006, showed that frequent church- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to

a homeless person, give excess change back to a shop assistant, donate blood, help a neighbour with housework, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, allow another driver to cut in front of them, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. Religious Americans are measurably more likely than their secular counterparts to give of their time and money to others, not only within but also beyond their own communities.

Regular attendance at a house of worship turns out to be the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender or race. Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to church (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer in a soup kitchen than a believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a religious community that makes it an ongoing tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

At the same time one has to make sure that 'religiosity' does not get in the way. One of the cruelest of all social science experiments was the "Good Samaritan" test organised, in the early 1970s, by two Princeton social psychologists, John Darley and Daniel Batson.[7] The well known parable tells the story of how a priest and a Levite failed to stop and help a traveler by the roadside who had been attacked and robbed, while a Samaritan did so. Wanting to get to the reality behind the story, the psychologists recruited students from Princeton Theological Seminary and told them they were to prepare a talk about being a minister. Half were given no more instructions than that. The other half were told to construct the talk around the Good Samaritan parable.

They were then told to go and deliver the talk in a nearby building where an audience was waiting. Some were told that they were late, others that if they left now they would be on time, and a third group that there was no need to hurry. Unbeknown to the students, the researchers had positioned, directly on the students' route, an actor playing the part of a victim slumped in a doorway, moaning and coughing – replicating the situation in the Good Samaritan parable.

You can probably guess the rest: preparing a talk on the Good Samaritan had no influence whatever on whether the student actually stopped to help the victim. What made the difference was whether the student had been told he was late, or that there was

no hurry. On several occasions, a student about to deliver a talk on the Good Samaritan, "literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way."

The point is not that some fail to practice what they preach.[8] The researchers themselves simply concluded that the parable should not be taken to suggest that Samaritans are better human beings than priests or Levites, but rather, it all depends on time and conflicting duties. The rushed seminary students may well have wanted to stop and help, but were reluctant to keep a whole crowd waiting. They may have felt that their duty to the many overrode their duty to the one.

The Princeton experiment does, though, help us understand the precise phrasing of the command in our parsha: "Do not see ... and ignore." Essentially it is telling us to slow down when you see someone in need. Whatever the time pressure, don't walk on by.

Think of a moment when you needed help and a friend or stranger came to your assistance. Can you remember such occasions? Of course. They linger in the mind forever, and whenever you think of them, you feel a warm glow, as if to say, the world is not such a bad place after all. That is the life-changing idea: Never be in too much of a rush to stop and come to the aid of someone in need of help. Rarely if ever will you better invest your time. It may take a moment but its effect may last a lifetime. Or as William Wordsworth put it: "The best portion of a good man's life: his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love." [9]

[1] See Baba Metzia 31a.

[2] Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Rotze'ach, 13:2, 14.

[3] Baba Metzia 32b; see also Tosafot, Pesachim 113b.

[4] Hilkhoh Rotzeach 13:4.

[5] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[6] Robert Putnam, David E. Campbell, and Shaylyn Romney Garrett, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

[7] Darley, J. M., & Batson, C. D. (1973). 'From Jerusalem to Jericho: A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27(1), 100-108.

[8] Tosefta Yevamot 8:7; Bavli, Yevamot 63b.

[9] Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey.'

**Rav Kook on the Perasha
Drafting Yeshiva Students
Rabbi She'ar Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa
and son of the Rav HaNazir, told the story of his
part in defending Jerusalem during the 1948 War
of Independence**

During the winter of 5708 (1947-1948), I was one of the younger students at the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva. I

was also a member of the Haganah, the pre-state Jewish defense organization. This was during the period of Arab rioting and attacks that erupted following the United Nations' vote on the 29th of November, 1947, to establish a Jewish state.

In those days, there was much discussion in Mercaz HaRav whether the yeshiva students should enlist to fight and defend. Both my father, the Rav HaNazir, and Rav Tzvi Yehudah were of the opinion that everyone is obligated to go out and fight. This was a milhemet mitzvah, a compulsory war in which all are expected to participate.

However, those close to the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap, argued that yeshiva students should continue their Torah studies in the yeshiva, and the merit of their Torah learning would bring victory in battle. They would quote the verse in Isaiah 62:6, "On your walls, Jerusalem, I have posted watchmen," explaining that these watchmen protecting the city are in fact scholars, diligent in their Torah study.

At that time, the situation in the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem's Old City was desperate. I came up with the idea of organizing a group of yeshiva students to establish a "Fighting-Defense Yeshiva" in the Jewish Quarter. The yeshiva's daily schedule would be comprised of eight hours for defense and guard duty, eight hours for Torah study, and eight hours for rest and sleep.

The proposal was brought before the Haganah command and was approved. But those close to Rabbi Charlap were vehemently opposed to the idea. The controversy within Mercaz HaRav disturbed me deeply and caused me great anguish.

One day, as I exited the yeshiva, I saw huge notices posted at the entrance to the yeshiva. It was a broadside quoting Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, of blessed memory, that yeshiva students should not be drafted into the army. When I read the notices, I was in shock. Was I acting against the teachings of our master, Rav Kook?

Agitated and upset, I made my way down the road toward Jerusalem's Zion Square. There I saw a figure walking toward me, slightly limping. As he came closer, I saw that it was Rav Tzvi Yehudah. I felt very close to Rav Tzvi Yehudah; he was like an uncle to me.

When he saw my shocked face, Rav Tzvi Yehudah became concerned. "What happened, She'ar

Yashuv? Why do you look like that? Don't be afraid. Tell me!"

Under the pressure of his questioning, I told him about my efforts to organize a "fighting yeshiva" in the Jewish Quarter, and my distress when I saw the posters which indicated that we were acting against his father's guidance.

When he heard my words, Rav Tzvi Yehudah was horrified. He grabbed me by my shoulders and roared, "This is a complete forgery! A distortion and utter falsehood!" He was so upset, his shouts echoed down the street.

After calming down, he explained that the notices had quoted a letter his father had written in London during the First World War. The letter dealt with drafting yeshiva students who had escaped from Russia to England. Rav Kook felt that these students should be exempt from the draft, just as the British exempted other clergy students.

But here — Rav Tzvi Yehudah motioned emphatically with his hands — here we hold on the Land of Israel and the holy city of Jerusalem. This is undoubtedly a milhemet mitzvah; whereas in England, the demand was that the yeshiva students fight for a foreign army.

The rabbi's words reassured me. I asked if he would be willing to write them down so that they could be publicized. He agreed. The rabbi publicized a broadside in which he objected to the use of his father's letter to Rabbi Hertz, Chief Rabbi of England, during World War I.

I also asked Rav Tzvi Yehudah to publish his views on the matter in a more detailed and reasoned format. He replied that there is no point in composing an article when the city is under siege and the printing presses are closed down. However, I was able to obtain a special permit from the Defense Board, so that a pamphlet containing five articles was published soon after.

In his article, Rav Tzvi Yehudah explained that joining the army at that time was important for three reasons: To save lives (pikuah nefesh); To fulfill the mitzvah of conquering and settling the Land of Israel (mitzvat yishuv ha'aretz); Due to the great public kiddush Hashem, sanctification of God's Name, when the nation of Israel is redeemed from danger.

"God's redeemed will return"

Even though I was the one who had initiated the pamphlet's publication, I did not receive a copy when it was printed. Due to special circumstances, several months passed before I received a copy.

I was one of the volunteers who succeeded in finding a way to slip inside the walls of the Old City. I joined the fighters there, and I was seriously wounded in battle.

When the Old City fell to the Arab Legion on May 27th, 1948, I was taken prisoner. The Jordanian commander was shocked to discover that only 26 of the surrendering Jewish soldiers survived the battles without serious injury. Embarrassed to return victorious to Jordan with such a small group of prisoners, he decided to also take wounded soldiers.

After seven months as a prisoner in Jordan, we were returned to Israel in a prisoner exchange deal. I was taken to Zichron Ya'akov to recuperate, and Rav Tzvi Yehudah came to visit me the first morning after my arrival.

The morning of Rav Tzvi Yehudah's visit, as I was removing my tefillin after morning prayers, I peered out the window and saw Rav Tzvi Yehudah slowly making his way up the mountain. Afterward, I found out that he had taken the very first bus from Jerusalem, and had traveled early in the morning all the way to Zichron Ya'akov in order to greet me.

I ran toward him, and he hugged and kissed me. He cried over me like a child. The truth is that my situation was so grave that my family and friends had nearly given up all hope. Until then, such a thing had never happened — returning alive from captivity in an Arab country. But the Jordanian King Abdullah had wanted to show the world that he was an enlightened monarch who respected international law....

After recovering from his outburst of emotion, Rav Tzvi Yehudah put his hand in his coat pocket and brought out a small pamphlet containing his article about defending the country. Inside was a personal inscription:

“For my dear beloved friend — the initiator, advisor, and solicitor [of this tract]. This pamphlet is set aside, from the day it was printed, until ‘God’s redeemed will return in peace, and joyfully come to Zion.’”

Decades later, I still have that treasured pamphlet carefully stored in my possession.

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mashmia Yeshuah, pp. 270-272)

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

“Remember that which Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the way when you went out from Egypt” (24:9)

This is a command of the Torah.

I cannot tell you how often we are to fulfill this commandment. Some Siddurim say it should be said every day. The Chafetz Chaim based his sefer on this. We are not merely commanded, “Not to go around being tale-bearers amongst our people” (Vayikra 19:16), but to remember what happened to Miriam, and the sin of Miriam was the sin that she was not judging others favorably.

Miriam's sin was really quite small. First, she posed it as a question. “Is it not that we also speak with Hashem?” (Bamidbar 12:2). It was a legitimate question. After all Miriam was a prophetess herself, and received prophecy before Moshe. So why was she punished? Because the closer one is to Hashem, the more one is held accountable, and Miriam was very great. However, she misunderstood the perfection of Moshe and the immensity of the prophecy Moshe received from Hashem.

This event was made part of the Torah with the intention of teaching us the importance of judging others favorably and giving them the benefit of the doubt, and that the evil of lashon hara does not only bring Tzaraat, but a great many other forms of suffering. Much suffering descends upon a person because of speaking lashon hara.

“When a camp goes out to war against your enemies” (Debarim 23:10).

You have no enemies except for yourself, and except for the Yetzer Hara, which everyone ignores.

Your enemy is not that other man.

Oh, he may want to kill you, but he can only take away your life.

The Yetzer Hara wants to take away your Neshama/Soul. He is the real enemy.

Quoted from “The Path of Life” by Rabbi Yehoshua Danese