

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TABO

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 60:1-22

AUGUST 31 – SEPT. 1, 2018 21 ELUL 5778

DEDICATION: Happy 1st Birthday Baby Choux !

Good Luck Daniel !!!

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor,
 Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 –
 Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day – - Give us 11
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

EDITORS NOTES

I apologize for being so late in getting this out this week. I especially apologize to those in Israel and points further east who may not receive this for Shabbat. Typically we have been sending on Wednesday or Thursday, but we've had a strange 36 hours.

There are a series of Travel articles entitled 36 hours in ... If we read those we can see how much can be done and what can happen in 36 hours. I had one of those 36 hours. We celebrated a birthday (or two) and an anniversary. We sat in a hospital for many of those hours frustrated by a health care system that has given rise to hospitals treating patients as pin cushions and nursing cows performing every unneeded test that the insurance company will pay for. We have doctors who are so pressed and divided; they have no time for their patients. And although we live in the information society, the game of telephone where a message is passed from one person to the next to the point that it changes completely is a sad reality in health care often resulting in a cavalcade of more tests and unnecessary procedures. Within all that we were fortunate to escape for a few moments to see our young grandchildren march at a wedding and while there in ensuring the couple was legally married while on the phone assisting in the preparation of two other weddings this weekend and finally running back to Manhattan and the hospital and upon returning relieved and thankful to find that the tests proved negative and everyone could go home. I am sure everyone slept soundly fatigued by mental and physical exhaustion. The 36 hours did begin with a class Wednesday evening on the Perasha and Rosh Hashana and coincidentally coincided with the Yahrzeit of our great great grandfather, Joseph Ovadia Bibi. I kept turning to Hashem with pleas in the merit of an ancestor I never knew but feel I know very well.

As we begin Rosh Hashana, we sing a piyut, a song which begins with the words, little sister – achot ketanah. The chorus of the song is tichleh Shanah VeKileloteha – May we end the year and its curses. The final verse declares may we begin the year with blessings.

We read this week the frightening account of what happens to Benai Yisral if things don't go right. We read of the ninety eight curses. These are frightening to say the least. These always are read a week before Rosh Hashana and perhaps that is where the song comes in. Next week we read Nisavim and my Rabbi would tell us that after the frightening speech of curses, Moses tells the people, but you are all standing here today. Stranger than hearing the curses, is learning of the reason they befall us. It is because we did not serve Hashem with a good heart. This truly meshes with the beginning of the portion where we read of bringing the first fruits and being thankful for all the good Hashem has done for us. As we wrote last week when discussing the simanim – the special foods we eat (and yes, you can replace black eyed peas with white beans this year), it is important to step into Rosh Hashana with appreciation and acknowledgment to Hashem.

Any 36 hours in our lives can come with emotional see-saws. We need to train ourselves to adjust our paradigm and focus on all the good, the positive and the possible and accept what we cannot change.

I thought of Joseph Ovadia Bibi. He was born in 1865. As a young man he was a known artistic prodigy when it came to engraving and chasing metal. He was contracted by the Sassoon family and traveled the world on their behalf. What was it like traveling to India and England 150 years ago? One could truly appreciate the idea of making the blessing, "who revives the dead" when seeing a parent, spouse, child or friend return after a trip when contact during the trip was nearly impossible. Receiving a letter must have seemed miraculous. And today, I laugh with my granddaughter on the other side of the world through Face Time.

He returned home and after marrying, he and his wife decided to settle in Damascus for a period. We are told that his intent was to teach the craft in the city known worldwide for the skill. But perhaps there were

other reasons for leaving home. We are told that his three sons were all named for siblings who died. Perhaps there was some plague. In Damascus his fame must have spread and he was contracted to display his art and teach his skills in North Africa and then in France and finally in San Francisco. My grandfather joined him on these trips primarily to avoid conscription into the Turkish military and then because Reuben Bibi was proficient in many languages having studied at American University as a translator and assistant. World War I broke out and they were separated from the rest of the family for 8 very long years during which time Joseph's daughter, a mother of two young children, was murdered by Arabs, probably for her work on behalf of the British and French. Eight long years without almost no connection makes me appreciate the miracle of jet planes and telephones and the ability to always connect.

When I think of their arrival in San Francisco where they were part of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal in August, and showing their skills to the more than 18 million visitors from around the world. I imagine their reaction. We read that the universal reaction of fair-goers was "a sense of wonder."

The creation of the Exposition began with the placement of 300,000 cubic yards of fill to create land for the site from what had formerly been San Francisco Bay and is now San Francisco's Marina district. The times were heady, and rapid strides were being made in engineering and manufacturing. My grandfather spoke of this often and it had a tremendous effect on him and certainly led to his interest in electrifying the candelabra, in the building of their lighting manufacturing factory when they returned to New York and his lifelong interest in flying.

The fair featured a reproduction of the Panama Canal that covered five acres. Visitors rode around the model on a moving platform, listening to information over a telephone receiver.

The first trans-continental telephone call was made by Alexander Graham Bell to the fairgrounds before the fair opened, and a cross-country call was made every day the fair was open.

The ukelele (originally a Portugese instrument, but adopted by the Hawaiians) was first played in the United States at the 1915 fair, creating a ukelele craze in the 1920s.

An actual Ford assembly line was set up in the Palace of Transportation and turned out one car every 10 minutes for three hours every afternoon, except Sunday. 4,400 cars were produced during the Exposition.

The entire area was illuminated by indirect lighting by General Electric. The "Scintillator," a battery of searchlights on a barge in the Bay, beamed 48 lights in seven colors across San Francisco's fog banks. If the fog wasn't in -- no problem: A steam locomotive was available to generate artificial fog.

Personalities abounded: Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were honored at a luncheon; Edison had perfected a storage battery that was exhibited at the fair. A pre-teen Ansel Adams was a frequent visitor.

The Liberty Bell made a cross-country pilgrimage from Philadelphia to be displayed at the fair. Notables, such as Thomas Edison, were often photographed with the bell.

The Machinery Palace was the largest wooden and steel building in the world at the time; the entire personnel of the U.S. Army and Navy could have fit inside. The first-ever indoor flight occurred when Lincoln Beachey flew through the building before it was completed.

Could you imagine the marvel they must have felt? I can think of the words of the Torah. Look at the world and celebrate all the good Hashem has given you.

For my great grandfather, running water, toilets and showers were a miracle, how much more so a pavilion of electrical lights, an auto factory and flying a plane indoors.

I never knew my great grandfather. He passed away 91 years ago, but we have pictures from his travels. We have the ads from the San Francisco Newspaper from 1916 when he opened a shop on Sutter Street following the war. We have a ketubah he signed as a witness at the turn of the last century. And we have his portrait hanging in our offices.

For those roller coaster 36 hours, he was there too. Yosef Ovadia reminded me to search out the good, smile, be appreciative. Life is never easy, but it's beautiful too. And with all that was happening, I got to see my own grandson Yosef and my granddaughter Amalya march down an isle and fill it with laughter. I am sure that their great, great, great grandfather was smiling too!

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Editorial from our friends at the Jewish Voice

Political affiliation aside, why don't American Jews at least acknowledge that Trump has been our most supportive president towards Israel since its birth 70 years ago? We have been trained, through experience, to discount lofty promises from presidential candidates during their campaign trails regarding their love and support for Israel. That is, up until now with President Trump in office. In the White House well short of two years he has already moved our Embassy to Jerusalem, acknowledging that city to be the eternal, indisputable, indivisible capital of the Jewish State, cancelled the notorious Iran deal, simultaneously placing rigid financial restrictions on that country, supported moderate Arab states to join with Israel for their common security, cut \$200 million from our annual aid to the Palestinian Authority, removed all funding for the UN's Palestinian agency UNRWA and just signed a revised upward financial support for Israel's missile defense system.

And in another major boost to Israel and a jab to the head of Palestinian supporters, in the coming days, our administration is expected to announce a new policy that effectively cancels any idea of the Palestinian "right of return." This major move is a signal that the Trump advisory team recognizes reality in the Middle East: That Israel is here to stay and that all of the fraudulent Palestinian claims to any part of Israel are once and for all, wiped out. Did anyone picture this scene way back on November 9, 2016?

He has not only faithfully fulfilled each and every commitment made to the supporters of Israel in the months leading up to his election but he has gone way beyond those parameters which leads one to ponder why most of the American Jewish community refuses to acknowledge the positive support for the Jewish State that Trump has evidenced. Rabbi Mark Winer, the president of the Florida Democrat Party Caucus of American Jewry headlined an article of his in a major Florida newspaper, "Trump is Trayf!" Roughly 72% of the Jewish vote went for Hillary in 2016.

And the future support for Israel among all Americans will be further reduced by the input of the radical Left sentiment among our K-12 teachers and college professors. Throw into this recipe for disaster such well organized and financed groups such as J Street, T'ruah, Jewish Voice for Peace and If-Not-Now that support the BDS movement, all working hand in hand with the radical leftist element of the Democrat Party which is in itself a huge block. A wake up call is needed for our Jewish community to finally come to

terms with and support our president and his proactive policies that serve to strengthen the bonds between Israel and the USA

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Ki Tavo - Tochacha and a renewed covenant with Hashem

1- Bikurim

2- Viduy maasrot (a confession that one gave his necessary tithes)

3- Moshe tells Benei Israel the mitsvot should be fresh to us like we received them today and reminds them we are Hashem's treasured nation

4- The mitsva of setting up the 12 stones and inscribing the Torah on them

5- The commandment to assemble on har grizin and har eval for a renewed acceptance that those who follow the mitsvot will be blessed and those that don't will be cursed

6- The blessings and tochacha (rebuke) of what will be if we do or don't follow the mitsvot

7- Moshe tells Benei Israel to remember all Hashem has done for us in Mitsrayim and the Midbar and thus we should make sure to keep this renewed covenant

Background on the 13 Midot

We recently began reciting the selichot and throughout the selichot prayers we recite the 13 midot quite often. What is the significance of the 13 midot and why do we repeat it so many times? What should we be thinking or feeling when we say the 13 midot?

To fully understand what we are attempting to accomplish with the 13 midot it is helpful to go back to the source in the Torah for the 13 midot, which is in Sefer Shemot, Parashat Ki Tisa. Reading this parasha may help us to invoke the feelings that were intended when saying the 13 midot. In sum, the parasha discusses the sin of Benei Israel by the golden calf. If we can imagine Benei Israel was the closest it had ever been with Hashem with the whole nation having personally experienced Hashem speaking to them just 40 days earlier at Har Sinai. And after entering a covenant with Hashem Benei Israel is unfaithful shortly after committing possibly the greatest sin that Benei Israel has ever committed in their history. They sin with the egel causing Moshe to smash the luchot. Moshe then goes up on Har Sinai for another 40 days to beg Hashem to forgive Benei Israel for this grave sin pleading with Hashem not destroy Benei Israel. And finally Hashem forgives Benei Israel. Following this Moshe goes up to Har Sinai for another 40 days to receive the 2nd set of luchot. And after receiving the luchot Hashem literally

“shows” Moshe and teaches him the text of the prayer that will always invoke his mercy. Hashem passed before Moshe saying these 13 attributes essentially telling Moshe that if you ever need forgiveness in the future this is what you are to say and do. This is what we are saying when we precede the 13 attributes with the words “va'yaabor Hashem al panav”, that Hashem passed before the face of Moshe saying these words. And this is what we mean in the paragraph of “kel melech yoshev al kishah rachamim” when we say the words “kemo she'odata la'anav mikedem (like you showed the humble one previously)”. The humble one is referring to Moshe. Hashem showed Moshe this tefilah. And as the gemara in Rosh Hashana states, Hashem told Moshe that by reciting this prayer we are “guaranteed” forgiveness for our sins. And this is what the 13 attributes represent.

With this in mind maybe we can better appreciate why we repeat these 13 attributes so often throughout our tefilot. Because these are the words that Hashem himself told us to say when we need forgiveness. This tefilah of the 13 midot was authored by Hashem himself. Not a person, not a great rabbi, not Moshe Rabenu, Hashem himself! And these are the words that Hashem said will invoke his mercy. These are the words that help us to remember that if Hashem was merciful enough to forgive us for the sin of the egel that surely there is room for us to be forgiven if we truly repent. And with this in mind maybe we can better appreciate why the theme of the 13 midot is so prevalent in the selichot prayers. They represent the epitome of forgiveness! May Hashem forgive all our sins!
Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther and Eliyahu ben Yvonne Chava
Le'iluy nishmat Leah bat Paula Bolisa A"H

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“You shall come to the kohen who will be in those days, and you shall say to him” (Debarim 26:3)

A tale is told of two impoverished brothers, each of whom received a monthly stipend from the town philanthropist. One day, one of the brothers, an elderly fellow, passed away. At the end of the month, when the surviving brother came to pick up the cash, he counted, recounted, and then looked up looking upset.

“This is my money,” he protested. “What happened to my brother’s stipend?”

“Your brother passed away,” the philanthropist reminded him.

“I know that,” the man replied indignantly, “but who exactly is my brother’s heir – you or me?”

It may have never happened, but the anecdote highlights a certain feeling of entitlement that is pervasive in contemporary society. There is a sense of expectation, an assumption that everything is supposed to be perfect, and when something is lacking, there is distress and even resentment.

This week’s parashah begins with the misvah of bikkurim, instructing us to take the first fruits to the kohen and recite certain pesukim at that time.

“You shall say to him,” prescribes the Torah, and Rashi tells us what to say: “that you are not kafui tobah” – you are not unappreciative. Rashi hold that the words “to him” seem superfluous. They teach us that the declaration that G-d has fulfilled His promise to give us the land of Israel must be directed to the kohen. For it is only by acknowledging to another that G-d has fulfilled His promise, that gratitude is expressed.

Rabbi Frand tells a story. A young couple was opening the envelopes with their wedding gifts, and they found a check from Rabbi Moses Feinstein of FDR Drive in Manhattan made out for \$500. Back then, \$500 was a small fortune, hardly the typical wedding gift for a young couple who were not even family. The hatan figured that maybe Rav Moshe mistakenly added an extra zero to the check, so he and his kallah, accompanied by his father, visited Rav Moshe to inquire.

“If I could, I would give you a check for \$5000!” Rav Moshe answered. “Your grandfather was Rav Pesach Pruskin – my Rebbe. I feel such gratitude to your grandfather that I wanted to give you a big present. Unfortunately I can’t afford to give you more than \$500.” Rabbi Reuven Semah

“Cursed is one who will not uphold the words of this Torah, to perform them.” (Debarim 27:26)

This pasuk is the last of a series of curses that were said on Har Gerizim and Har Eival when Bnei Yisrael entered the land. The Rabbis ask: What does it mean to uphold the Torah? They explain that this is referring to one who has the ability to uphold and strengthen the observance of the Torah and misvot by those who are neglecting it. Since we are all guarantors one for another, even someone who is fulfilling the entire Torah but fails to encourage others to keep the misvot is included in this statement. The Gemara, however, teaches that each of the twelve curses listed in the parashah was preceded by a parallel blessing. So before this curse was stated, they said “Blessed is one who upholds the words of the Torah.” This means that anyone who succeeds in encouraging others to follow the Torah will be blessed.

This is something that does not just apply to the Rabbis and teachers. Hashem has given abilities to each and every one of us to raise the level of

observance and Torah learning in others. If someone was blessed with wealth, he has the opportunity to support Torah institutions. One who was blessed with wisdom can teach others. Someone who has management skills can set up organizations to help others in many different ways. And every one of us can serve as a role model for others, especially for our children. By living our lives according to the standards of the Torah, others will see the beauty of the misvot and be inspired to grow as well. May we succeed in upholding the standards of the Torah, in ourselves and in others, and thereby enjoy the blessing that was declared by the entire nation when they entered the land of Israel. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

The Iron Dome

"Having an army is a truly major expense but it may be needed to put down insurrections. There have been times when riots occurred, and the army stood ready to shoot looters. The mere knowledge that such a force was available to the authorities discouraged the wilder elements of society from rioting."

Our prayers and Hashem's love for His people is an Iron Dome defense system against the insurgents' daily plots to annihilate Israel. (Norman D. Levy; Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind.)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Happiness

Parashat Ki-Tavo describes the ninety-eight Kelalot (curses) that God threatens to bring upon Benei Yisrael should they disobey the Torah. At one point in this section, the Torah informs us of the particular cause of these calamities: "Tachat Asher Lo Avadeta Et Hashem Elokecha Be'simcha" – "on account of the fact that you did not serve Hashem your God with joy" (Devarim 28:47). Surprisingly, the Torah here does not refer to a generation that simply disregarded the Mitzvot; it speaks of a generation of Jews that are indeed loyal to God's laws, but begrudgingly, without joy and enthusiasm. The Torah demands not only that we obey the Mitzvot, but that we rejoice and take pleasure in the performance of Mitzvot; in other words, the Torah demands that we be happy.

This requirement is expressed in other contexts, as well. King David famously wrote (Tehillim 100:2), "Ivdu et Hashem Be'simcha" – "Serve God with joy." He didn't instruct simply, "Serve God," but rather than we must do so "with joy." The Gemara in Megila presents the famous rule,

"Mi'shenichnas Adar Marbim Be'simcha" – "When [the month of] Adar comes, we increase our joy." Conversely, in Masechet Ta'anit we read, "Mi'shenichnas Av Mema'atim Be'simcha" – "When [the month of] Av comes, we decrease our joy." These two passages work off the basic assumption that a Jew must constantly live in a state of happiness. Halacha requires increasing or decreasing the level of joy at different periods of the year, but some level of Simcha (joy) must be maintained at all times. Rabbi Shimon Schwab compared the requirement of Simcha to a pilot light on a gas range. The flame must always remain lit, and one lowers or raises the fire as needed. Similarly, a Jew must live each day of the year with a certain degree of happiness, which he increases or decreases depending on the particular season.

Every person on earth spends his life pursuing happiness, but, unfortunately, few of them actually achieve happiness. If the Torah demands that we live and serve God with joy, then it clearly assumes that we are capable of achieving a state of happiness. But how is this achieved? What is the Torah's "secret" to attaining true joy and contentment?

In Sefer Melachim I (8:66), the prophet tells that after the fourteen days of celebration for the inauguration of the Bet Ha'mikdash, Benei Yisrael returned home happy. What was the cause of their happiness? As Rabbi Avraham Pam noted, it could not have been just the delicacies and fine wine they enjoyed during the celebration. Many among Benei Yisrael lived a distance of several days' travel from Jerusalem, and yet the prophet tells that they felt joyous upon returning home – long after the pleasure provided by the food and wine had subsided. They were happy because of the spiritual elevation they had just experienced during the inauguration of the Temple. As the Yalkut Shimoni remarks on this verse, they rejoiced "because they enjoyed the glory of the Shechina."

True joy results from spirituality, not from material gain. King Shelomo, the wisest and wealthiest of all men, commented in the Book of Kohelet (1:14), "I have seen all the creations that were made under the sun – and behold, it is all vanity and worthlessness." Kohelet enjoyed all the luxuries and pleasures of life, and concluded that this does not bring a person happiness. The Rabbis remarked, "A person who has one hundred – he wants two hundred." Material wealth can never bring contentment,

because the more one has, the more he desires. Ultimately, as the Rabbis comment in a different context, "A person does not die with half of what he desires in his possession." There will always be a wide gap between the wealth one has achieved and the wealth he still desires, and this gap leads one to depression and frustration.

Important as it is to earn a respectable living, wealth alone will not make a person happy; only religion and spirituality can bring true happiness and contentment. Rabbi Samson Refael Hirsch claimed that the word "Samei'ach" ("happy") is etymologically related to the verb "Tz.M.Ch.," which means "grow." What brings a person joy is growth, spiritual advancement. When a person is stagnant, when he is not growing or progressing, he feels frustrated and depressed. Children are happy and excited by nature, because they are constantly growing at an accelerated rate. They are always learning new information and coming upon new experiences. Herein lies the key to happiness: spiritual growth.

To the outsider, the Torah life might seem burdensome and restrictive. To those who experience it, however, it is the greatest source of joy and accomplishment in the world. A person who spends his time and energy solely on material gain and physical indulgence will never feel happy. A swimmer submerges his entire body in water and works to move forward, but he must occasionally come up for air. Similarly, although a person must "submerge" himself in a career and work hard to earn a living, he cannot survive spiritually unless he "comes up for air," unless he designates sufficient time for Torah and Mitzvot. Otherwise, he can never achieve genuine happiness, which can come only through spiritual growth and elevation.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list
If you want to receive this article every week,
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

**Rabbi Wein
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER OSLO**

A most controversial anniversary was marked here in Israel this month. A quarter of a century ago Israel signed the Oslo agreements establishing the Palestinian Authority and giving it control over millions of people and a large swath of territory in the

land of Israel. This anniversary was marked in almost complete silence here in Israel.

The hopes and optimism engendered by the Oslo agreements and the handshake between Arafat and Rabin have long faded in the face of the realities of terrorism and duplicity. Israel hoped that Arafat would somehow turn into Nelson Mandela bringing reconciliation and peace to a very troubled and frustrated society. Instead Arafat embarked on a program of terrorism, with extreme and unachievable demands and goals, and sowed the seeds of generational hatred within the Palestinian society.

I remember how hopeful and happy many Jews were when the Oslo agreements were signed and publicized. The naysayers were silenced, if not even pilloried and deplored. The Oslo agreements split the Israeli public and Israeli politics for decades. Only through a shameful public bribe of appointing a member of Knesset as a minister were the agreements ratified by the Israeli legislature with basically a one vote majority.

In perfect hindsight I am certain that if the Oslo agreements were again to be brought for a vote by the Israeli Knesset, a substantial majority would reject the entire matter. The experience of a quarter century of unremitting tension and bloodshed has certainly sobered Israeli public opinion. Basically, Israel is no longer convinced that signing pieces of paper and having ceremonies at the Rose Garden of the White House is really in its best long-term interest.

The basic fallacy of Oslo was that we listened to what Arafat said in English and willfully ignored what he was saying in Arabic. It was the classic example of whistling past the graveyard, hoping somehow that our adversaries were reciprocating our good intentions. After bitter wars in Lebanon and Gaza and unprecedented terrorist attacks and Intafadas within Israel itself, it has become quite clear that the vision of Oslo was at best very naïve and premature if not even downright foolish and self-destructive.

Unfortunately, Rabin was becoming quite aware of the weakness of the Oslo agreements when he was assassinated, and Israel was plunged into a terrible and bitter political divide, which persists even until today. Neither of those who supported Rabin on the question of Oslo nor those who opposed him, have truly forgiven the other side for their attitudes and behavior in this matter.

Aside from the external difficulties that the Oslo Agreements have caused Israel, the internal damage

to Israeli society and politics has also been enormous and most painful. However, it must be said that most Israelis today place little trust not only in the Oslo Agreements but are very wary of any new types of proposals that may be offered to arrive at a peaceful accommodation with our Palestinian neighbors. This has created a diplomatic paralysis that undoubtedly cannot exist forever.

There are many proposals being offered to facilitate the long-term or even short-term arrangement between Israel and its Palestinian neighbors. The fact that the Palestinians are bitterly divided between Fatah and Hamas certainly complicates the matter. It seems obvious that even if there is any reconciliation between the two Palestinian groups, it is unlikely that Palestine will be ruled as one united country.

Israel, for its part, seems more than satisfied to arrive at a short-term arrangement that would achieve relative security and tranquility for its immediate future. A great change of mindset must occur both in Israel and amongst the Palestinians in order to achieve a long-term modus vivendi between Israel and the Palestinians. It would be the challenge of the educational systems, the media and the political leaders of both societies to help create the general atmosphere that would allow for sincere negotiations and eventual agreements.

As of this writing unfortunately few if any are willing to undertake this challenge. As Oslo proved, the devil is always in the details. No amount of high sounding slogans or soothing words can hide the fact that dealing with the details of the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is extremely complex. I do not think that they can be solved in one fell swoop, by one grand agreement. The words of the rabbis of the Talmud, that trying to grab too much will mean that one grabs not at all, certainly apply to this situation. Let us hope in the new year that somehow progress will be made towards achieving a just and lasting agreement.

RABBI YOSEF FARHI

In self-help, we are taught that what makes people move, change, become motivated, is from one of two things: either running away from pain, or running towards pleasure. If we would like to discover how this expresses itself in our observance of Judaism, it can translate into the belief that G-d offers reward for good deeds and punishes for sin. When you believe this, that G-d rewards the righteous and that the sinners suffer, it is easier to stay motivated to keep Mitzvoth and refrain from Averot. The problem, the reason why this is confusing, is because in the world of העלם, G-d allows the illusion that the

righteous suffer and the mirage that sinners get away with it.

We all want G-d to grant us a good year. And G-d wants us to give Him a good year, as well, by making Him King. You cannot expect G-d to be good to you, if you do not want to keep your side of the "bargain". As Orthodox Jews, we all believe in reward and punishment. We believe that G-d will pay us for our good deeds, and that our sins have a price tag. But unfortunately, this is mostly a belief that is reflected upon in the past or present. I realized that I never reflect on this belief when I plan my future. That if I daven with more heart, G-d may answer my prayers. That if I learn without interruption, I may have more success in financing my family. And that if I give more Tzedakah and do more Chessed, G-d will open the gates of Heaven and allow His blessings to pour into my life.

Parashat Ki Tavo has a fundamental lesson interlaced throughout the Parasha. You want good in life, in this world and the next? Invest in G-d. Do more mitzvoth. Less sins. More Torah.

For example. The Midrash tells us, in the beginning of the Parasha, how powerful a Mitzvah can be. *That someone who does a Mitzvah, has more of a right to have his request granted of G-d than someone who is dealing with a king. When dealing with a king, you can offer him a fortune, just to get in to see him; and you have no way of knowing if he will do as you request. But G-d is not that way. A person goes down to his field and sees a first fig of the crop, or the first cluster of the crop and puts it in his basket. And he comes and stands in the Temple and says, "השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים ובך את עמך את ישראל ואת האדמה אשר נתת לנו כאשר נשבעת לאבותינו ארץ זבת חלב ודבש: G-d, Gaze down from your holy dwelling and bless Your nation, Yisrael, and the land that you gave to us, as you swore to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey. The Midrash adds that the person offering Bikurim now says, I am not going to leave this spot, until You do all that I need!*

The right the man has to ask, to demand directly of G-d is something Resh Lakish learns from the adjacent words of the following passuk. היום הנה יקנך אלהיך מצוקה לעשות את החקים האלה ואת המשפטים ושמרת ועשית אותם בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך. ... "This day Hashem commanded you to do". Resh Lakish explains the flow of pesukim, that a Heavenly voice would go out and say "You will have [plenty, success] again, next year."

What does this mean? I have the power, to decide my fate through my deeds? Having a good life is up to me? I am in control of my destiny, my future, the outcome? We pray to Hashem while bringing the Bikurim, השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים ובך את עמך את ישראל ואת האדמה אשר נתת לנו Gaze down from Your holy dwelling, from the Heavens, and bless Your Jewish Nation and the Land You gave us. Rashi says on this, that the person bringing the Bikurim is saying, עשינו מה שגורת עלינו, עשה אתה מה שעליך לעשות, We did what you have decreed us to do; now, do Your part, as it

milk and honey. And now I am bringing the first fruit of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me." (Deut. 26:5-10)

This passage is familiar to us because we expound part of it, the first four verses, in the Haggadah on Seder night. But this was no mere ritual. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explained in his *Zakhor: Jewish History and Memory*, it constituted one of the most revolutionary of all Judaism's contributions to world civilisation.[2]

What was original was not the celebration of first fruits. Many cultures have such ceremonies. What was unique about the ritual in our parsha, and the biblical world-view from which it derives, is that our ancestors saw God in history rather than nature. Normally what people would celebrate by bringing first-fruits would be nature itself: the seasons, the soil, the rain, the fertility of the ground and what Dylan Thomas called "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower." The biblical first-fruits ceremony is quite different. It is not about nature but about the shape of history, the birth of Israel as a nation, and the redemptive power of God who liberated our ancestors from slavery.

This is what was new about this worldview:

[1] Jews were, as Yerushalmi points out, the first to see God in history.

[2] They were the first to see history itself as an extended narrative with an overarching theme. That vision was sustained for the whole of the biblical era, as the events of a thousand years were interpreted by the prophets and recorded by the biblical historians.

[3] The theme of biblical history is redemption. It begins with suffering, has an extended middle section about the interactive drama between God and the people, and ends with homecoming and blessing.

[4] The narrative is to be internalised: this is the transition from history to memory, and this is what the first-fruits declaration was about. Those who stood in the Temple saying those words were declaring: this is my story. In bringing these fruits from this land, I and my family are part of it.

[5] Most importantly: the story was the basis of identity. Indeed, that is the difference between history and memory. History is an answer to the question, "What happened?" Memory is an answer to the question, "Who am I?" In Alzheimer's Disease, when you lose your memory, you lose your identity. The

same is true of a nation as a whole.[3] When we tell the story of our people's past, we renew our identity. We have a context in which we can understand who we are in the present and what we must do to hand on our identity to the future.

It is difficult to grasp how significant this was and is. Western modernity has been marked by two quite different attempts to escape from identity. The first, in the eighteenth century, was the European Enlightenment. This focused on two universalisms: science and philosophy. Science aims at discovering laws that are universally true. Philosophy aims at disclosing universal structures of thought.

Identity is about groups, about Us and Them. But groups conflict. Therefore the Enlightenment sought a world without identities, in which we are all just human beings. But people can't live without identities, and identity is never universal. It is always and essentially particular. What makes us the unique person we are is what makes us different from people in general. Therefore, no intellectual discipline that aims at universality will ever fully grasp the meaning and significance of identity.

This was the Enlightenment's blind spot. Identity came roaring back in the nineteenth century, based on one of three factors: nation, race or class. In the twentieth century, nationalism led to two World Wars. Racism led to the Holocaust. Marxist class warfare led eventually to Stalin, the Gulag and the KGB.

Since the 1960s, the West has been embarked on a second attempt to escape from identity, in favour not of the universal but the individual, in the belief that identity is something each of us freely creates for him- or herself. But identity is never created this way. It is always about membership in a group. Identity, like language, is essentially social.[4]

Just as happened after the Enlightenment, identity has come roaring back to the West, this time in the form of identity politics (based on gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation). This will, if allowed to flourish, lead to yet more historical disasters. It is a major threat to the future of liberal democracy.

What was happening in Jerusalem when people brought their first-fruits was of immense consequence. It meant that that they regularly told the story of who they were and why. No nation has ever given greater significance to retelling its collective story than Judaism, which is why Jewish identity is the strongest the world has ever known, the only one to have survived for twenty centuries with none of the normal bases of identity: political

power, shared territory or a shared language of everyday speech.

Clearly, not all identities are the same. Characteristic of Jewish identities and others inspired by the Hebrew Bible are what Dan McAdams calls “the redemptive self.”[5] People with this kind of identity, he says, “shape their lives into a narrative about how a gifted hero encounters the suffering of others as a child, develops strong moral convictions as an adolescent, and moves steadily upward and onward in the adult years, confident that negative experiences will ultimately be redeemed.” More than other kinds of life story, the redemptive self embodies the “belief that bad things can be overcome and affirms the narrator’s commitment to building a better world.”

What made the biblical story unique was its focus on redemption. In partnership with God, we can change the world. This story is our heritage as Jews and our contribution to the moral horizons of humankind. Hence the life-changing idea: Our lives are shaped by the story we tell about ourselves, so make sure the story you tell is one that speaks to your highest aspirations, and tell it regularly.

[1] Mishnah, Bikkurim 3:2-6.

[2] Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Memory*, University of Washington Press, 1982.

[3] The historian David Andress has just published a book, *Cultural Dementia*, subtitled *How the West Has Lost its History and Risks Losing Everything Else* (London, Head of Zeus, 2018), applying a similar insight to the contemporary West.

[4] In his new book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2018), Yuval Harari argues passionately against stories, meanings and identities and opts instead for consciousness as the basis of our humanity, and meditation as a way of living with meaninglessness. He takes a position diametrically opposed to everything argued for in this essay. In the modern age, Jews – whether as philosophers, Marxists, postmodernists or Buddhists – have often been leaders of the opposition to identity. The late Shlomo Carlebach put it best: “If someone says, ‘I’m a Catholic,’ I know that’s a Catholic. If someone says, ‘I’m a Protestant,’ I know that’s a Protestant. If someone says, ‘I’m just a human being,’ I know that’s a Jew.”

[5] Dan McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

The main Avoda/Theme of the Judgment Day is focusing on "Hashem Melech", The King.

Hashem created the Universe (which was created on Rosh Hashana) & He runs it all.

He is the only One that has any power & only He can do anything for us.

On Rosh Hashana we work on gaining clarity on our EMUNAH. The more Emunah you gain, the more you

are ready for the Yom Hadeen, because Emunah includes everything.

Rambam: "I am Hashem your G-d"(10 Commandments) this is the Mitzvah to gain Awareness & Belief in Hashem. This is most fundamental & supercedes even admitting our sins which we don't do on Rosh Hashana.

We have to first think about and do Teshuba for the sin of forgetting that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge of everything, since the lacking of it is the root of our doing sins.

When you go out into the world and you have to make a living and feel you are all alone, know that Hashem remembers people. He remembers Noach (Mussaf Amidah); and so too He remembers the descendants of Noach. This is part of Rosh Hashana, realizing and remembering that He is "Hazan et haolam kulo"/He is sustaining the whole world. That is, your livelihood that you have every day.

The great Purpose in life is to constantly improve, that is something that Hashem is urging us and weighing.

"Hashem imparts wisdom to the wise person" (not the jester) because He sees that this wise person will make the best use of this gift. So, we want to improve ourselves to be in this position for the Great Day of Judgment, Yom Hadeen.

"Asher Bara Elokim Laasot", ". "That Hashem created to do". The words 'to do' seem superfluous since it was already stated that "Hashem rested from all of the work that He did".

R' Miller explains that the words "to do" come to teach us the great purpose of life is to be a doer, to make something out of ourselves through constant improvement/Teshuba.

Hashem, our Father, Avinu Malkenu, is waiting on Rosh Hashana to hear our commitment to improve. "Bring a Minha offering and come before Hashem" (Hodu) We should come today with some commitment.

We can say, "Hashem, we are going to utilize the coming year to love & fear You. To do everything to serve Hashem. I am going to make something out of myself".

When Hashem hears our commitment for the New Year, He says: "My child, I see that you are committing to improvement, I commit to giving you another year of life and blessing"