features
Privileged to Serve: 3
Navy Jew: 7
Tonight’s Your Sabbath?: 8

Jewish Chaplaincy Timeline: 10
My Life vs. Military Life: 14
Special Offers: 42
By the Grace of G-d
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Chaplain Israel Haber
Elmendorf AFB, Alaska

Greeting and Blessing:

...Military service, by definition and practice, very aptly illustrates the basic principle of commitment to Torah and Mitzvot, namely “naaseh” (“we will do”), and then “v’nishma” (“we will understand”).

Moreover, the soldier’s duty to carry out the orders of a commanding officer, and carry them out promptly and to the best of his ability, is in no way inhibited by the fact that in civilian life the soldier may be vastly superior to his commanding officer in many respects. Nor does such a circumstance diminish in the least the soldier’s self-esteem in obeying the order. On the contrary, by not allowing any personal views to interfere with his military duties, he demonstrates his strength of character and integrity.

The same is true in the area of Torah and Mitzvot. One may be a very rich man - in the ordinary sense, or rich in knowledge of the sciences, or in other achievements in public life. Yet, when it comes to Halachah, the Law of Torah conduct, he accepts it with complete obedience and dedication, on the authority of a fellow Jew who had consecrated all his life to Torah study and is eminently qualified to transmit the “Word of G-d - the Halacha.”

A further point which characterizes military discipline also has a bearing on the subject of Torah and Mitzvot. In the military, no soldier can claim that his conduct is his personal affair; nor can he take the attitude that there are many other soldiers to carry out military assignments, but he will do as he pleases. For it has often been demonstrated in military history how one action of a single soldier could have far-reaching consequences for an entire army and country.

Every Jew is a soldier in the “Army of G-d,” as is often emphasized in the week’s Sedra - kol yotze tzovo, “everyone going forth as a soldier.” And he is bound by the same two basic rules: To carry out G-d’s commandments promptly and fully, without questions (naaseh before v’nishma), and to recognize his responsibility to his people (“All Jews are responsible for one another”), hence the consequences of one good deed. To quote the Rambam: “Every person should always consider himself and the whole world as equi-balanced. Hence, when he does one Mitzvah, he tips the scale in favor of himself and of the whole world” (see it at length in Hilchos Teshuva, 3:4).

May you go from strength to strength in all that has been said above, in all aspects of Yiddishkeit, which includes also influence to promote among non-Jews the observance of the basic Seven Mitzvot, with all their numerous ramifications, which are incumbent upon all mankind and the foundation of human society...

With esteem and blessing,
I was born in 1975 in a small town in Massachusetts, and grew up in a very Americanized, Conservative Jewish household. All things considered, ours was a pretty traditional Jewish home: we celebrated some semblance of Chanukah, went to shul on most Jewish holidays, made a few blessings that we probably mispronounced, but we did the best we knew how. The rabbi of our synagouge was Rabbi Lowell Weiss, who, I later found out, was actually a USNR chaplain. He encouraged everybody to be active participants in Judaism. I remember that at one point he got very frustrated that his summer synagogue service numbers would drop, so he offered Red Sox tickets to any kids who’d come to Friday night or Saturday services.

My father had been in the Army and served in Vietnam, in Armor. He saw quite a bit of action, and was a Purple Heart recipient a few times over. My mother was also military; she was a yeoman in the USN, and served stateside. Both served one enlisted contract as Active Duty, and kept pride in their military service afterwards. For Armed Forces Day, we always went to nearby Fort Devins, and we’d tour the grounds and enjoy the celebrations. They’d feature tanks on display, and coming from his Armor background, my dad would explain all the technology and developments to me. So I grew up with a lot of pride in the military, and with a lot of patriotism.

Our family was educated with traditional Jewish education. My older sister went to the Lubavitcher Yeshiva of Worcester until we moved, and I went to preschool in that school as well. Even though I was little, I recall some of the energy of the education there. One of the rabbis, Rabbi Fishman, was a large man with a huge beard and booming baritone voice. He left an absolutely indelible impression on me as he described the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, with the thunder and lightning and all, in preparation for the holiday of Shavuos. Many years later, as a Sergeant deployed in Iraq, I received a “thank you for your service” letter from a student at the Lubavitcher Yeshiva of Worcester. I very proudly responded to her that I had attended the school as a pre-schooler, and remembered the rabbis, including her own grandfather and Rabbi Fishman. To my great surprise and pleasure, Rabbi Fishman wrote back to me. That was a wonderful moment.

Later, our family moved to Broward County, FL, where I went to High School. I enlisted on May 20, 1993, while still a senior; interested in the Army both because of my patriotism, but also because of the college benefits. My senior high school experience ended up being different than that of all my friends; on the one hand I had Drill weekends while they were out partying, but I also had extra money.

My first MOS was as a combat medic, and Basic Training for us was at Fort Jackson. I was not in shape, and I was in for a shock. A drill sergeant pulled out those of us who were struggling at PT, and made a pointed comment while looking directly at me about “the weak guys not making it through”. I responded, “Drill Sergeant, the US Army will not pay me a penny for the bronze I do not have; but they will pay me a dollar for the brains I do have!” The Drill SGT walked away to laugh at the comment, but of course, he still gave me an extended PT session. I was very insubordinate, but I made it through basic - barely!

Throughout my senior year, I was assigned to a combat support hospital in Perrine, FL. I had a great time there. I was very limited in what I could do because I had not gone
I stayed in the Reserves, and began taking classes at Touro College toward getting a degree. At Touro, I was very intrigued by my Jewish studies course, and found myself looking for something more substantial than the dry university classes. The head of Touro’s Jewish Studies Department saw my thirst for Torah knowledge, so he sent me to a small yeshiva for returnees to Judaism in Queens, called Kesser Torah. That was the first time I did any serious Jewish learning.

Overall, I had an interesting Reserve career; remaining a combat medic, until eventually I reclassed as a Chaplain’s Assistant. That change happened as a result of the first Jewish chaplain I met, who was a Reservist assigned to my brigade at Fort Hamilton. By that point, I was keeping Shabbos, and the chaplain was able to work out with my command permission for me to get Shabbos off. Because of his influence, I moved over to become a Chaplain’s Assistant. In my non-Reserve life, I became a DoD civilian. That expanded my knowledge of the ins and outs of office work. I learned a lot in that job, which really helped me when I became a Chaplain. Truth be told, my enlisted career moved pretty slowly. I remained an E5 for quite a while, mostly because I didn’t go to the schools I should have. But I was a really good DoD civilian, and was moving up quickly there.

In 2005, while still a Reservist, I was deployed to Baghdad for twelve months as part of a chaplain detachment team. This was in the middle of the President Bush’s Surge - at that point, we had 170,000 troops fighting heavily in Iraq. I arrived between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and quickly got myself oriented to my responsibilities. We were assigned to augment the AD chaplains at Camp Liberty, which was just outside the Baghdad International Airport. At the time, there were two Jewish chaplains in Iraq, CDR Mitchell Schranz and CPT Mordechai Schwab. It was an intense Yom Kippur - you could hear missiles and explosions constantly while we prayed. Chaplain Schranz ran Yom Kippur services at Camp Victory. While I assisted him in setting things up, during services I was focused on prayer, so I kept my Tallis over my head. But apparently I was also attracting someone’s attention...

At this point, we turn our attention to Mrs. Laurie Lans, or as she was known then, LtJG Laurie Zimmet.

I couldn’t get to shul for Kol Nidrei, because the road from my office at Camp Slayer to Camp Victory was too dangerous to walk at night. But I walked the 3.5 miles during the day to get there for Yom Kippur services, in full body armor, loaded down with weapons. I finally got to the chapel, exhausted and totally dehydrated as a result of the incredible heat. I was religiously observant, and as I walked in, I saw that there was no mechitza to separate between the men and women in the chapel. I thought to myself, “No biggie - I’ll pray in the back.”

I began looking around to get my bearings, and then I saw something that drew my eye. There was a man in uniform in the front of the room with a Tallis over his head. I had no idea if he was a general or a private; I couldn’t see his rank. But as he said the confessional prayer Al Cheit, he was banging his chest with tremendous force - I had never seen anyone doing Al Cheit as loud and hard as this man! It was remarkable! I was trying to pray in the back, and I kept hearing the “Thump! Thump!” of him hitting his chest. Now I don’t know if it was because of the bombs going off in the background, the dehydration, or whatever - but I decided I’m going to go over to this guy and check his rank. If he’s a PVT, I’m going to call rank on him (as a LtJG) and tell him to cut it out; and if he’s a GEN, well, then I’ll let him beat himself up. But he had that Tallis on, covering everything up, and I couldn’t tell his rank! I kept trying to peek at his uniform to figure out his rank, looking one way or another.

Finally, I couldn’t handle it any longer, and during a break in the services, and despite the possible breach of modesty, I walked straight up to him and said, “Soldier, what did you possibly do that could be that wrong?!” He turned around to look at me, he took the Tallis off his head, and there was a huge explosion in the background as he said, “Oh, you wouldn’t want to know!” To which I responded, “I want to...
hear every detail.”

*And that is how Moshe Lans met Laurie Zimmet.*

**Back to CH Lans:**

A few months after that Yom Kippur, both Jewish chaplains left theater, and I was made the Jewish Lay Leader. The senior chaplain called me into his office, and instructed me to make a plan to serve the Jews in the area in some sort of battlefield rotation. He gave me 24 hours to come up with the plan.

The next day, I came into his office, and handed him a paper that said: “Option 1: Get a new Jewish chaplain. Option 2: See number one.” The senior chaplain was furious with me for that! I told him, “Listen, I know where all the Jews in the AOR are located. But in order to visit them on battlefield rotations, I’d need Air Mission Requests filled, with helicopters to back me up. I’m just an E5; there are O6s not getting air mission requests fulfilled because they’re so overloaded with requests!” The chaplain looked me in the eye and said, “I’m an O5. I can get those requests filled. Give me those lists and a schedule of when and where you want to visit!” Two weeks later, he called me back into his office, and handed me a stack of approved AMRs!

So I took on that responsibility, and made sure to visit every Jew we knew of, at every FOB. During that period, I also used to walk 4 miles every Shabbos to study Torah with Laurie. She kept on pushing me to expand my horizons, saying, “Why aren’t you an officer?”

Laurie eventually got moved to the Green Zone; so we got her endorsed as a Lay Leader as well, and were able to split responsibilities up between us. We were able to accomplish a lot during that year.

All throughout that time, Aleph was an incredible support for me. Rabbi Katz sent me whatever we needed, along with detailed instructions on how to do everything - how to teach people to lay Tefillin, specific prayers to say and teach and more. Somehow, whenever I asked him for supplies, he’d get them to me within a couple of weeks. Regular Army channels would take several weeks longer!

When I got back CONUS, Rabbi Katz invited me to the first Aleph Shabbat With the Troops conference. I was thrilled to come - I wanted to come and personally thank Aleph for everything they’d done for me and our troops out in Iraq. I really had a great time at the Shabbaton, and that Sunday, a fellow participant told me about a program to get Semicha. Laurie strongly encouraged me to jump on the opportunity, so I did, and became a Chaplain Candidate in 2008.

At that point, Laurie and I were really good friends, but we’d never actually dated. That winter I went to CHBOLC, while Laurie was in DC on extended orders. Thanksgiving was coming up, and both of us had always wanted to go to the Macy’s Day Parade in Manhattan, so we agreed to meet there for the weekend. Laurie had no idea, but I went with the explicit intent of proposing to her. When I did propose to her, she was taken aback, and being a bit hesitant, said she’d think about it.

In the meantime, that Thursday, the Chabad House in Mumbai was attacked by terrorists. We didn’t yet know what happened to the Chabad representatives there, Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg. That Shabbos morning, we went to Rabbi Kugel’s shul in the Upper West Side. In his sermon that day, Rabbi Kugel made reference to the tragic situation in Mumbai with the Holtzbergs, and said, “In honor of the Holtzbergs, everyone needs to live life as completely as possible. If you’re thinking of having a baby, and worried about finances, do it anyway. If you’re thinking of getting married and are hesitating for any reason, just do it.” Laurie was furious, thinking that I told him to say that, so she quickly picked her head over the mechitza to see my reaction. I ducked! The guy sitting next to me asked me what’s going on, and I said, “I just proposed to a girl on the other side, and she’s not sure yet…” He started cracking up, and now the Rabbi wanted to know what was going on! And when he heard, Rabbi Kugel started laughing, and publicly said, “I was not asked by anyone to make this announcement!”

By Saturday night, unfortunately we’d found out that the Holtzbergs had been killed, so we decided to take the Rabbi’s suggestion seriously. On Sunday morning, we went to the Rebbe’s resting place to ask for his blessing for our marriage, and some friends made a mini-engagement party
on the spot. We were married in 2009, and went AD soon after, in winter 2010.

That year, I went on my first AD chaplain deployment. I followed CH Joey Messinger, who had begun a very successful newsletter, called “Jewish Afghanistan”. There was an O6 who really liked the newsletter, but he wanted to change the name, because he thought it was too “evangelical”. Laurie and I discussed it for a long time, and eventually changed the name of the newsletter to “Dveikus”, meaning “deep connection”. Considering the impact their tragic death had on our lives, we dedicated it in memory of Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg. We still publish that newsletter. Dveikus, as well as any other good that we do in the military, is always dedicated to them.

Considering their length of their service, as well as their extensive experiences assisting Jewish SM with their Judaism, we asked CH and Mrs. Lans two crucial questions about keeping Judaism in uniform, particularly for Enlisted personnel:

What challenges do Jewish Service Members typically face? What is critical for Jewish enlisted personnel to know?

* Upholding Jewish tenets in the US Armed Services requires ardent devotion and effort. Kosher, Shabbos, taharat ha-mispacha are all capable of being observed without compromise to halacha or serving in the United States military, but it is not easy. Most importantly, deliberate prior planning is critical to achieving success. As an example, the closest kosher butcher has been round-trip three hours or more from this Chaplain since entering active duty ten years ago, so prior planning is critical to ensuring ample kosher meat. Additionally, keeping the Service Member’s Chain of Command apprised of their religious needs breaks down barriers, and assists in obtaining any permission desired or needed. In this Chaplain’s experience, military schools are the least accommodating, with Initial Entry Training the most stringent and the least favorable towards religious accommodation requests.

* Realize that Judaism is not an all or nothing religion. Do what you know, aspire to learn more, and observe more as you slowly grow. Know that every US Armed Service branch permits yarmulkes in uniform. Understand the regulations regarding the yarmulke to comply.

* Enlisted Initial Entry Training is unlike the remainder of your career. You will need to be somewhat flexible. For example, Enlisted Service Members during Initial Entry Training who keep kosher will be hungry! Observing the strictest kosher standards during enlisted Initial Entry Training is very close to impossible. Observing Shabbos and holidays during enlisted Initial Entry Training is extremely difficult. Prearrange enlisted Initial Entry Training such that there are no Jewish holidays interfered with.

* Eating at the dining facilities is not going to properly fulfill a kosher diet. Enlisted Service Members who live in the barracks need separate rations to keep kosher. Enlisted Service Members receiving separate rations are able to eat kosher 100% of the time, but this requires access to a cooking facility. Cooking kosher and non-kosher together in the same place is difficult, and not advisable. A shared kitchen is not ideal, but consulting an orthodox Rabbi/Chaplain will help you work out the details how to make things work.

* Understand that the separate rations money enlisted Soldiers receive is for their dining facilities but is being paid to these enlisted Soldiers because they keep kosher, which precludes eating at the dining facility. To receive separate rations but consume non-kosher is tantamount to a chilul Hashem - a desecration of G-d’s Name. Do not consider this a deterrent to keeping kosher and fulfilling this beautiful mitzvah.

* Work on non-Jewish holidays for those who work instead of you during the Jewish holidays.

* Do your utmost always to be a Kiddush Hashem, a sanctification of G-d’s Name, by being exemplary in all you do.

* And know that I am always here to help you and your family!
I’m not sure why I was asked to write this article, as I don’t think I have much to say and I’m admittedly uncomfortable talking about myself, so I’ll be brief and spare you any prolixity.

I’ve done 21 years of service, roughly four of Active Duty and the rest Reserve. Most of my career has been serving the Marine Corps (eighteen years), usually as a Medical Officer, and my time with the Marines has been entirely fulfilling. I’ve gone overseas six times for the military, and my military career is coming to a close as I’ve submitted the paperwork for retirement.

My most relevant religious experience in the military took place in Iraq. The Navy rabbi laid upon me the duty of religious lay leader for Jews in Al Asad in 2006, which I felt totally unqualified for. Thanks to Aleph, I had material to help me in this role, without which I could not have survived. We didn’t once make Minyan, as Jews were either in hiding as Marranos — there were few openly Jewish troops in the Navy or Marines — or on duty with the Marines. During this tour fell the High Holy Days. The Iraqi interpreter told me that on the base was an oasis which legend had it that our Patriarch Avraham stopped at on his way to the Holy Land. It’s a grove rich in palms and reeds, and a startling contrast to the glaring barrenness of the Iraqi desert. My chaplain escorted me to the oasis, and I spent Yom Kippur there praying in solitude. It was an uplifting and poignant experience as I contemplated on our courageous ancestor Avraham, alone in his belief in One G-d, taking on the journey that would change the world.

In my military experience I only experienced anti-Semitism once directly and once indirectly, and I think the latter was only parsimony. I had the misfortune to have a CO who could not restrain his feelings that Jews killed his Lord. This came out twice while I served under him, and the Sailors and Marines around me were as mortified as I, but after a serious discussion with him, I heard no more of his hateful speech. The other experience was a failure to provide kosher MREs because I was the only one who asked for them and the unit said it was too expensive for one person out of 1,200. I managed nevertheless, and Kosher beef jerky became a food group.

Overall I had little issues being a Jew in the military. When I requested time for prayer or religious ceremonies, it was granted graciously. I’ve enjoyed Shabbat and holidays in the field while in remote and exotic locales as well as in the beautiful temple at the Norfolk Navy base. I can’t complain about being a Jew in the military; it’s been an honor to serve our nation, the freest and most noble country on earth, based on Judeo-Christian ethics. My heart will always be with the Marine Corps, who treated me with respect and honor. I hope other Jews are willing to be open about their faith while serving and let our American brethren know that we are as committed to the United States as they are.

The Aleph Institute would like to extend our wishes of Mazal Tov to Captain Spira, along with our heartfelt thanks for his service to our country, and blessings for success and meaning in his civilian life onward!
Underwater for the first time on a fast attack submarine was exciting to say the least. As an observant Jew, it was also challenging. There was so much to learn about the platform, and so many halachic (Jewish practice) questions that I could not have anticipated. Which way do you face when saying the daily prayers? Can you say the prayer for the new month while looking at the moon through a periscope? I had long before prepared for issues of keeping kosher.

The first Friday I was aboard, I was checking the daily schedule to see what time sundown was so I could prepare for my first Shabbat underwater. The Skipper came by to check on me and asked what I needed. I told him I needed to know the time of sundown, and he said, “I forgot, tonight’s your Sabbath, right?” We spoke for a few minutes and he became rather serious. He had learned in a class years before that Jews had certain prohibitions during their Sabbath. Looking me directly in the eye, he said, “Is there anything we need to do on this boat so that you can properly observe your rituals?”

What other nation in the world could this happen? Here is someone who can push one button and potentially destroy the world, asking how he can make this weapon of mass destruction more Shabbos-like for a lone Jew far under the sea!

My Story or History?

To paraphrase from Lord Rabbi Sachs, former Chief Rabbi of England, my story is not your story. History is rather, “his” story. But we all have so many stories. Wearing a kippah (traditional head cover) has always identified me as a Jewish member of our armed forces. Over the course of 37 years of combined service, I have heard countless stories of hardship and heroism and have gathered many of my own.

With the assistance of The Aleph Institute and others, I am in the process of gathering “war stories” about Jews in the military. With enough help, maybe this could even be gathered into a more formal record or even a book. Please send me your tales of good, bad and even ugly. Remember to include your name and contact information, where you served, and if you’d rather your story be anonymous.

You may contact me at victor.stiebel@mac.com.

I truly look forward to hearing your story!
Jews in American Military History: Richard Stern

By CSM Sam Yudin, CA ARNG

The United States has a long and proud history of immigrants serving in its military. In every war from the Revolutionary War to the present War on Terror, immigrants, some of whom were not even citizens, have served in virtually every position imaginable. In the earlier conflicts, these were primarily European first generation immigrants, but in the past few decades, the first generation immigrants have come from all over the world; as Asian, African, and South American immigration increases.

Jewish first generation immigrants have likewise heeded the call to service in their new nation, especially in appreciation of the freedom and liberty they now enjoyed. Richard Stern was one such first generation Jewish immigrant. What makes his story unique is not only did he serve with valor in the US Army during World War II but that he also served with valor in the German Army during World War I.

Richard Stern enlisted in the German Army as a teenager and was awarded the prestigious Iron Cross for his distinguished service during World War I. Later, Hitler would send the Hanseatic Cross to Stern for his war merit, not realizing Stern was a Jew. On April 1, 1933 Nazis launched the boycott of Jewish owned businesses. Stern is seen, in a famous image at right, in front of his Cologne bedding store wearing his Iron Cross next to the Nazi guard, standing there to prevent Germans from entering; mockingly reminding them of the German laws about respecting war veterans.

Stern arrived in the United States at the age of 40 in 1939. He lived in Queens and worked as a bus boy. On October 13, 1942, still not a citizen and at the age of 43, he enlisted in the US Army. Stern served with distinction in the US Army, earning the Silver Star for gallantry in action. In January of 1944 on Mount Porchio, Italy, under heavy enemy fire, SGT Stern addressed the enemy in their native German, and convinced them to surrender. Stern's Silver Star is still treasured by his family, but his German medals are nowhere to be found. Family legend has it that in 1942, the US was in need of metal for bullets, so Stern gladly melted down his Iron and Hanseatic Crosses to make bullets for use in the fight against the Nazis!

References:
The German Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory
By Tim Grady

July 1861: The 65th Regiment of the 5th PA Cavalry, commanded by Col. Max Freedman, elects Capt. Michael Allen, pictured at right, their chaplain. Allen had previously served as a Sunday school teacher at his synagogue in Philadelphia, but was not an ordained rabbi.

Sep 23, 1861: Capt. Allen resigns as a result of a complaint from a YMCA volunteer. Assistant adjutant general of the Army, George D. Ruggles, writes: “Any person mustered into service as a chaplain, who is not a regularly ordained clergyman of a Christian denomination, will be at once discharged without pay or allowance.” Allen resigns his commission on the excuse of “poor health” rather than suffer the dishonor of dismissal from the service.

October 23, 1861: Col. Freedman convinces the Rabbi of New York’s Cong. Shearith Israel, Arnold Fischel, pictured at left, to apply for the chaplaincy, as an ordained clergyman. On this date, he is denied the position for not being of Christian denomination.

Dec. 11, 1861: Fischel personally meets with President Abraham Lincoln to discuss Jews as chaplains.

Dec. 13, 1861: Lincoln writes to Fischel: “I find there are several particulars in which the present law in regard to Chaplains is supposed to be deficient, all which I now design presenting to the appropriate Committee of Congress. I shall try to have a new law broad enough to cover what is desired by you in behalf of the Israelites.”

March 12, 1862: The law allowing non-Christian chaplains passes in the Senate.

July 17, 1862: The law allowing non-Christian chaplains passes the House. It reads: “No person shall be appointed a Chaplain in the United States Army who is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination, and who does not present testimonials of his good standing as such minister, with a recommendation as an Army Chaplain, from some authorized ecclesiastical body of not less than five accredited ministers belonging to said denomination.”

Sep 18, 1862: Reverend Jacob Frankel, pictured at right, enlists in the Union Army to serve as the first Jewish US military chaplain. He serves in a hospital.

April 1863: Chaplain Ferdinand Sarner, left, becomes the chaplain of the 54th NY Regiment. He would become the first Jewish chaplain to serve under fire. His horse was shot out from under him and he was wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg.

April 9, 1917: The first Jewish ecclesiastical endorsing body, the Jewish Board for Welfare Work (later called the Jewish Welfare Board) is formed. In September of 1917, it is granted government recognition. Its current Endorser is Chaplain CAPT Irv Elson, USN CHC.

May 1917: Chaplain Harry Richmond enlists in the Army, joining the 34th Division. He would become the only Jewish chaplain to serve overseas in both WWI and WWII, one of two Jewish chaplains who served in combat in both European and Pacific theaters of WWII (the other being Chaplain Aryo Hyams); and as one of the two Jewish chaplains stationed in Honolulu at the bombing of Pearl Harbor, with Chaplain H. Cerf Straus, the first two Jewish chaplains under fire in WWII.

June 1917: The Jewish chaplain’s insignia is fixed, as above, at the top left of this article. The Navy would adopt it in 1941. (Until then, Jewish Navy chaplains were enjoined to wear a cross or a non-denominational
shepherd’s crook.) The letters representing the Ten Commandments on the Tablets were originally Roman numerals. On December 17, 1980, the Navy changed them to the Hebrew letters, and the Army and Air Force followed soon after.

Feb. 2, 1943: The USS Dorchester is sunk by a German U-Boat. On it are the legendary Four Chaplains, who gave their life jackets to others, including Chaplain Alexander Goode, who is the first Jewish chaplain to be killed in uniform.

April 11, 1944: Chaplains Herschel Schacter and Emanuel Schenck, two of the 32 Jewish Chaplains who entered Germany with Allied troops, are with the General Patton’s troops as they liberate Buchenwald. Chaplains Eli Bohnen and David Eichhorn enter Dachau on April 30. Later, Chaplain Abraham Klausner, pictured at left, arrives at Dachau. When his unit was moves, he tells his superiors, falsely, that he was reassigned to Dachau. He founded the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews of Europe, and was a major figure in assisting the displaced Jews.

August 1944: Chaplain Judah Nadich, right, is appointed Special Consultant on Jewish Affairs to General Dwight Eisenhower.

March 21, 1945: Chaplain Roland Gittelsohn, left, the first Jewish Chaplain attached to the USMC, gives a speech at the dedication of the cemetery at Iwo Jima: “Here there are no quotas of how many from each group are admitted or allowed. Among these men there is no discrimination. No prejudice. No hatred. Theirs is the highest and purest democracy.” It achieves notoriety as the most influential speech ever given by a military chaplain, partially because many of his fellow chaplains tried to force the local command chaplain to rescind his invitation to Gittelsohn to speak at the public dedication of the cemetery. Attempting to ward off controversy, Gittelsohn declined the honor, but gave the speech at the Jewish dedication of the cemetery. Copies of it were then spread, by friendly chaplains, up the chain of command and to media outlets around the world. Gittelsohn later wrote: “I have often wondered whether anyone would ever have heard of my Iwo Jima sermon had it not been for the bigoted attempt to ban it.” For a long time, this speech was read by Congress every year on Memorial Day.

January 1, 1948: The Survivor’s Talmud, right, is printed by the US Army to fill the requests for Torah study material in the DP Camps.

November 2, 1948: A double tragedy strikes as USAF Chaplain Solomon Rosen, son of Chaplain Herman Rosen, who drowned on June 18, 1943 - the day before he was to enter Army Chaplain School - is killed when the C-47 he is flying in is hit by lightning.

1950: A “Rabbinical selective service” is created to voluntarily draft Jewish chaplains into uniformed service. This unofficial “draft” from the major Jewish seminaries would last until the Vietnam War, when anti-war sentiment pervading the culture forces the change.

1974-1975: The USAF builds a mikvah at Elmendorf Air Force Base, the first mikvah in Alaska, under the auspices and for the needs of Chaplain Israel Haber.

July 1975: Chaplain Bertram Korn, right, is promoted to Rear Admiral, the first Jewish chaplain to receive flag rank in any of the United States armed forces. He is followed by Brigadier General Simeon Kobrinetz (USAFR - 1983), Brigadier General Israel Drazin (USAR - 1984), Rear Admiral Aaron Landes (USNR-1987) and Rear Admiral Harold Robinson (USNR-2004).

July 1976: Chaplain Mitchell Geller wins his court case against the USAF for attempting to reassign him to Inactive Reserve status for wearing a beard. In upholding Geller’s claim, Judge Robinson ruled that the court is persuaded by the record that “the wearing of beards, although not required, is a well-established religious tradition among members of the Jewish faith, and that Geller wore his beard in furtherance of that religious practice.”
January 30, 1978: Chaplain Jacob Goldstein, R, is granted exception to policy by the Chief of Staff of the Army to wear a beard “as long as Rabbi Goldstein remains a member of his current religious community” while in the NY National Guard.

November 23, 1979: Two Jewish students at Harvard University, Joel Katcoff and Allen Weider, sue the US Army on the basis of being taxpayers, arguing that military chaplains should be replaced with non-combat volunteers or contractors. Jewish US Army Reserve chaplain and civilian lawyer, Chaplain Israel Drazin, is given the responsibility of directing the case (later to be named Katcoff v. Marsh) from the perspective of the Chaplain Corps. He was assisted by Chaplain Sanford Dresin, right, then the Army Chaplain Corps’ Chief of Personnel Actions. In its final ruling, issued on January 22, 1985, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit finally upholds the right of the military to employ chaplains.

1981: The Aleph Institute is founded, directed by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to assist and care for the well-being of members of specific populations that are isolated from the regular community: US military personnel, prisoners, and people institutionalized or at risk of incarceration due to mental illness or addictions.

Oct. 23, 1983: USMC Chaplain Arnold Resnicoff is present at the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, and immediately involves himself in the rescue efforts. On April 13, 1984, President Reagan recounted Chaplain Resnicoff’s experiences at a speech to a Baptist Fundamentalism conference, including his recollections about how following the bombing, he had lost his yarmulke sometime after using it to wipe a wounded Marine’s face. To help his colleague replace it, Catholic Chaplain George Pucciarelli tore off a piece of his own Marine camouflage uniform, as seen at left. This speech was entered into the Congressional Record, and it had significant influence on the Yarmulke Law of 1988. Chaplain Resnicoff would later become the first Jewish EUCOM Command Chaplain.

1986: Goldstein vs. Weinberger - the Yarmulke Case. From 1970-1972, S. Simcha Goldman served as a Navy Chaplain, and later transferred to the USAF as a clinical psychologist. Dr. Goldman was threatened with court-martial for wearing a yarmulke indoors, after having done so for many years in Active Duty without incident. Dr. Goldman lost his case in the Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision, but Congress reversed it in a provision added to the 1988 National Defense Authorization Act, declaring: “A member of the armed forces may wear an item of religious apparel while wearing the uniform of the member’s armed force.”

June 2007: Chaplain Brett Oxman becomes the first Jewish Air Force Command Chaplain. Chaplain Oxman’s unique approach to military chaplaincy, with a primary focus on the operational side of the Air Force over chapel-based services, will become the template for all AF chaplains in the decades ahead. In 2010, he becomes the first Jewish war fighting Component Command Chaplain (AFCENT), and follows that in 2011 when he becomes the first Jewish MAJCOM Command Chaplain.

July 1, 2007: After decades of servicing Jewish service members with supplies, The Aleph Institute becomes a DoD recognized ecclesiastical endorsing agency. Chaplain (COL) Sanford Dresin, the Vietnam War’s most decorated Jewish chaplain and the only Jewish chaplain to serve (secretly) in Cambodia, becomes its Endorser.

November 23, 2011: Chaplain Mendy Stern, left, becomes the first bearded Active Duty Army chaplain in the modern US military, following litigation, represented by famed lawyer Nathan Lewin, who had fought the Geller and Goldman cases as well. Chaplain Stern is followed by Chaplain Levy Pekar (USAF, 2017) and Chaplain Levi Ceitlin (USN, 2019).

October 24, 2011: The Chaplain Monument on Chaplains Hill at Arlington is dedicated, depicted at right, honoring the 14 Jewish chaplains who have given their lives in defense of this country.

Today: We currently have 76 Jewish chaplains across all branches of the US military, including Reserve and Guard, attached to bases across the world.

References: Rabbis in Uniform, by Louis Barash; The Fighting Rabbis, by Albert Slomovitz
Off the Bookshelf: 
A Review of Mendel Kalmenson’s “A TIME TO HEAL”

CH (CPT) Michael Harari
Fort Riley, KS

Author Mendel Kalmenson once again succeeds with a book slim in size, but rich in content and deep in feeling. “A Time to Heal - The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Response to Loss and Tragedy” presents a clear window into the world of grief and tragedy from the mindset of a man who knew personal and national tragedy from up close, and overcame them all. The window created by Kalmenson allows the reader to look at events and deal with feelings through the positive spiritual paradigm that was the Rebbe’s hallmark. In life, grief and tragedy are universal; but how one deals with them is not. This book puts lofty Jewish ideas and ideals into everyday common language. The subjects are well structured to cover a variety of areas, such as dealing with personal tragedy, helping others through their difficulties, and a response to global disasters.

The book’s approach to loss is sensitive, educational and empowering. A person can use the book both for personal reference material, and just as easily as a teacher’s guide. Unfortunately, personally, I have found too many times that I have called on the information found in the book for my friends, family and soldiers. But fortunately, the wisdom contained within it has been a comfort and way forward for many.

According to our tradition, the consolation text of "May the Omnipresent comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem," teaches us that the great pain of a single individual or family is shared by the entire nation.

Please know that if you have the need to read "A Time to Heal", you are not alone. The Jewish nation is a single unit. Our joys are the joys of our people, our losses are the losses of our nation. We are all in this together. May G-d bless you and your loved ones, and may He bring us the ultimate time of healing, when the prophets promise us, “He will eradicate tears from every face”, with the coming of our righteous Mashiach, speedily in our days.

A limited number of copies of “A Time to Heal”, a winner of the coveted “Best Book Award” under the general category of religion in the “Best Book Awards” international competition, is available for Jewish Service Members from the Aleph Institute. Email military@aleph-institute.org for more information.

In loving memory of Shalom Dov Ber Benchimol.
I was told my family will be moving to Okinawa, Japan, a place so far from home, both in physical distance and cultural lifestyle. We were given a house on base and placed with the task of making it a home, forced to be satisfied with its odd shape and thick concrete walls. I was told to be ok when my husband gets a 4:00 AM call that has him running to his office for an emergency counseling session, to be ok when they send my husband to a different country to visit deployed units. I was told we will live in Japan for a set number of years, and I was told that number can change at any given moment. And when the military decides it is time, we will pack up all the pieces that represent our life and ship them off to our next home of the military’s choosing. It’s ironic, really. I never considered myself to be one of those people, the adventurous travelers who laugh in the face of the unfamiliar. I never considered myself to be the type of person who would willingly sign up for a life of PCS moves, deployments, and constant TDYs. I never thought I’d be ok with agreeing to a life where all major and minor life occurrences are dictated by an outside force. The truth is, I’m still not sure I am.

I don’t know what the future will hold. Military life, proving itself victorious in our fight for control, assured me of that. I don’t know where we will live and if we will have access to kosher food. I don’t know how long we live in Japan and when my husband will deploy. Yet, there are things that I do know; there are things that I can control. I know what wherever we live we will make it a home. I know that life will always bring adventure and excitement, that we will always have opportunities to create new memories. I know that no matter what military life throws at us, we will embrace it, appreciate it, and find the joy in it.

There is this nameless thing in our home, in our lives, taking our space and our time. There is this nameless thing that we can’t quite pinpoint, yet often look to with accusatory eyes and a blaming finger. With no single word to label it, we call it, simply, “military life”. It is there when our family vacation gets cancelled, and it is there when non-duty days become workdays extended by overtime. It is there when we foolishly attempt a Sunday outing, and it laughs mockingly when our plans are once again cancelled. It is there when people leave our lives as quickly as they entered, and it is there when moving dates are delayed and PCS orders changed. Because that’s the thing about military life: it’s always there, reminding you of its power and its unpredictable nature. This thing is in our lives, dictating much more than any outside force should have a right to.

We fought in the beginning, military life and me. I was determined it would not get the best of me, determined I would be the controlling force in my life and not allow this newcomer to hold that title. I came first, I thought righteously, I will be the victor. Yet, military life just laughed and quietly went about its way to prove itself triumphant. It subtly wove its way through my life, tugging on threads I thought secure and creating patterns and designs I did not want. I began to wonder if I had what it takes to survive this lifestyle, to accustom myself to a life where I have little control of what will happen and where we will live and if our children will be able to attend a Jewish school. It worried me, the endless possibilities of what military life can bring. It frightened me, the realization of how little I can control. All the ifs and the buts and the maybes, all the things left up to the hands on top pulling the strings.

I was told my family will be moving to Okinawa, Japan, a place so far from home, both in physical distance and cultural lifestyle. We were given a house on base and placed with the task of making it a home, forced to be satisfied with its odd shape and thick concrete walls. I was told to be ok when my husband gets a 4:00 AM call that has him running to his office for an emergency counseling session, to be ok when they send my husband to a different country to visit deployed units. I was told we will live in Japan for a set number of years, and I was told that number can change at any given moment. And when the military decides it is time, we will pack up all the pieces that represent our life and ship them off to our next home of the military’s choosing. It’s ironic, really. I
Dogtags in Halacha

Recently, I came across a miniature treasure: a comprehensive publication published in 1947, entitled “Responsa in Wartime”. It is a collection of halachic responsa, a series of important and common questions regarding real issues that came up during WWII regarding the treatment of military personnel in the battle theater, posed to Rabbinic authorities.

One such question (page 5), was whether or not a Jewish nurse may wear a cross with her dog-tag. The chaplain who raised the question explained that her concern was that perhaps there was a chance she would be stranded somewhere in the South Pacific and the natives would simply see the cross as a symbol of friendship.

The committee of Rabbis who published this book answered the question beautifully:

“In Shulchan Oruch Yoreh Deah (178:1) the question is raised about Jews wearing non-Jewish garments, when prohibited and when permitted. The commentator Sifsei Cohen says that in times of persecution, it is certainly permitted for a Jew to disguise himself wearing non-Jewish clothes. Thus, if for example, the question were whether Jewish soldiers fighting on the European continent might not be permitted to conceal their Jewish identity by wearing dog-tags without the letter H for Hebrew so that if captured by Nazis they would not be mistreated, the answer would be that it is certainly permitted.”

Parenthetically, I love how the Rabbis, in good Jewish tradition, answered a question with another question and only thereby to come to a clear answer.

The Responsa continues: “However no such concern exists in the South Pacific. When discussing the status of idols, Shulchan Aruch (141:1) states that objects meant for decoration only are not idols. The Ashkenazic authority Rabbi Moshe Isserles comments: ‘A cross meant to be prostrated to is a forbidden object, but one that is worn around the neck is merely a memento and is thus not forbidden.”

The Committee of Rabbis concluded: “To use a cross as the nurse intended to is not forbidden by law, but since it is clearly against Jewish sentiment, the committee refrains from advising her on this matter. She herself must judge how grave the danger is and how much help the symbol would give her.”

After reviewing this responsa several times, I was confounded. The poor nurse! European theater or South Pacific, the girl is giving up her tranquility, sense of safety and security of her home, possibly even her life. She was probably even drafted against her true free will and yet the Rabbis are taking all the facts and details of circumstances into consideration, as if she were sitting on the front porch of her Long Island home in the suburbs somewhere, sipping an ice cold glass of lemonade, trying to earn brownie points with her neighbors.

Yet, after a few moments I realized something truly profound, and in it, a lesson for us all. If you’re in the army, there are protocols, rules and regulations, books and manuals that inform you what to and what not to do. As a nurse, she went to school and was trained what to do and what not to do. If she ever had a question, she would need to put it forth to her superiors, who would weigh the rules and the regulations carefully, keeping in sync with Military procedures and strict guidelines. Her following the guidelines set forth by her senior military or medical staff does not influence or compromise her care and or concern for her patients.

Similarly, I thought, Judaism as a religion is a system of carefully considered methods, techniques, rules and regulations for a productive and healthy result and future of the individual person’s body and soul, along with their family and their children’s children for generations to come. Surely a military nurse would have no issue regarding and respecting this ideology, recognizing the value of having guidance from a higher perspective.

The Rabbis beautifully answered the question in Jewish law, yet wisely left it to her to make a decision on her own. For only a soldier on the front line can apply the true answer, considering the very personal results of that decision. To me, there is no greater sense of freedom and no more rewarding feeling than for a trained individual to learn how to make their own decisions based on their knowledge and training. And that is, perhaps the meaning of the Sages saying that you can’t judge a person unless you’ve... well, let’s say you’ve “worn their dog-tags”.

As for the dog-tags, you got to love them. Whether the H is for Hebrew or the J is for Jewish, let us wear them proud on the battlefield, in our homes and in our communities, and mostly on our hearts and minds.

May God bless America and G-d bless our troops.
• With High Holidays swiftly approaching, we want to ensure that all installations have Jewish services. Inquire from your chaplains if there is a Jewish Distinctive Faith Group Leader (Lay Leader) at your base. If not, email us at warrior@aleph-institute.org to inquire about becoming a certified DFGL! We will help you through the entire process!

• The Warrior may be going to print soon - please update us with your address so you can get the full-color magazine delivered to your mailbox! (Who doesn’t love real mail?)

• We also would like to keep Jewish chaplains and DFGLs aware of all the Jews in their AOR. Please provide us with your latest PCS moves as soon as they occur, so we can make sure you are kept in touch with the Jewish community nearest you.

• Is there just a small Jewish community near you? Looking for more fellow Jews to interact with? Join the Jewish Service Member Whatsapp group! Send a message with your name to Rabbi Estrin, at 206-267-8764 and join our group, for discussions, short Torah videos from chaplains, Zoom class opportunities, and friendship!

• With our partnership with JNet, we can find you a Torah study partner, for the subject and at a time of your choosing! See their ad on Page 8. JNet’s director, a good friend of ours, is extremely sick while recovering from COVID-19, so we would appreciate the extra effort to use their fantastic services in the merit of his recovery.

• Mazal tov to Aleph Chaplains, CH (MAJ) Lans and Chaplain CDR Kleinman on their promotions!

• Do you and your family have a letter in a Torah scroll? Participate in the Healing Hearts Torah for just $1.00 per letter. This special Mitzvah is one that brings very special blessings along with! Go to https://hhflorida.com/torah/ for more information. You can also have your children purchase a letter for that amount in the International Jewish Children’s Torah! Go to www.kidstorah.org for more information about this beautiful project.

• We are always looking for article contributions, no matter the rank, no matter the branch! Tell us about your military experiences and Jewish reflections. Please email submissions to warrior@aleph-institute.org.

• Enjoy the content? Get more Jewish military content on a regular basis! We post articles, information, stories and links several times a week. “Like” our Facebook page: @JewishAmericanWarrior!

• We will be printing a one-time run of a collection of this year’s Warriors in a single book! To order, email us at warrior@aleph-institute.org. Price will be determined based on the number of orders; payment will not be taken until we have ascertained final price.

• Corrections to our Shavuot issue of the Warrior: Chaplain Harold Gordon, subject of the Flying Torah article, retired as a Major. The website “Jews in Green” was started by Jason Rubin, and Brian Kresge moved it onto Facebook. Sorry about that!
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The Three Weeks
Period of Mourning
July 9-30

17th of Tammuz Laws &
Customs

The fast of the 17th of Tammuz, known as Shiva Assar B’Tammuz, is the start of a three week mourning period for the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples.

The fast actually commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date:

1. Moses broke the tablets when he saw the Jewish people worshiping the Golden Calf.
2. During the Babylonian siege on Jerusalem, the Jews were forced to cease offering the daily sacrifices due to the lack of cattle.
3. Roman officer Apustmus burned the holy Torah.
4. An idol was placed in the Holy Temple.
5. The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans, in 69 CE, after a lengthy siege. (Three weeks later, after the Jews put up a valiant struggle, the Romans destroyed the second Holy Temple on the 9th of Av.)

The Jerusalem Talmud maintains that this is also the date when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on their way to destroying the first Temple.

Practically speaking, here are the basic rules of the fast:

* Healthy adults – bar or bat mitzvah age and older – abstain from eating or drinking between dawn and nightfall.
* Pregnant and nursing women do not fast. Someone who is ill should consult with a rabbi. Even those exempt from fasting, such as ill people or children, shouldn’t indulge in delicacies or sweets.
* It is permitted to wake up early before the fast begins to grab a bite, provided that prior to going to sleep you had in mind to do so.
* During the morning prayers we recite selichot (elegies), printed in the back of the prayerbook. The "long Avinu Malkenu" is recited during the morning and afternoon prayers.
* The Torah is read during the morning and afternoon prayers. The reading – the same for both morning and afternoon – is Exodus 31:11-14; 34:1-10, which discusses the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident, how Moses successfully interceded on the Israelites' behalf and attained forgiveness for their sin. After the afternoon Torah reading, the special fast-day Haftorah, Isaiah 55:6–56:8, is read.
* During the amidah of the afternoon prayer, all those who are fasting add a small section, the aneinu, to the Shema Koleinu blessing.

Abstaining from food and drink is the external element of a fast day. On a deeper level, a fast day is an auspicious day, a day when G-d is accessible, waiting for us to repent.

The sages explain: "Every generation for which the Temple is not rebuilt, it is as though the Temple was destroyed for that generation." A fast day is not only a sad day, but an opportune day. It's a day when we are empowered to fix the cause of that destruction, so that our long exile will be ended and we will find ourselves living in messianic times, may that be very soon.

The 9 Days Laws &
Customs:

**Heightened Mourning, Uplifting Visions & Rejoicing with Mitzvot**

The first nine days of the month of Av, and also the morning of the tenth, are days of acute mourning for the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples.

THREE WEEKS
SCHEDULE

17th of Tammuz Fast:
This year is observed on Thursday, July 9, 2020

9 Days:
July 22-30

9th of Av:
 Begins at nightfall on Wednesday, July 29, and ends at nightfall on Thursday, July 30, 2020

During this time, we do not:

* Eat meat or drink wine, for during this period the sacrifices and wine libations in the Holy Temple ceased. The exceptions to this rule are meat and wine consumed on Shabbat or as part of a meal that celebrates a mitzvah, such as a circumcision, Bar Mitzvah, or the completion of a tractate of Talmud.
* Launder clothing (except for a baby's) – even if they will not be worn during the Nine Days – or wear freshly laundered outer clothing. Those who wish to change their clothing daily should prepare a number of garments and briefly don each of them before the onset of the Nine Days.
* Swim or bathe for pleasure.
* Remodel or expand a home.
* Plant trees to be used for shade or fragrance (as opposed to fruit trees).
* Buy, sew, weave, or knit new clothing — even if they will only be worn after the Nine Days.

Exceptions to this rule: a) If you will miss a major sale or if the garment will be unavailable later. b) For the purpose of a mitzvah, e.g., purchasing new clothing for a bride and groom.

* Cut nails during the actual week of the fast of Tisha b'Av, i.e., starting from the Saturday night before the fast until the conclusion of the Nine Days.
The Three Weeks - The 9th of Av

of Av, Tisha b'Av.

What do you make of all this? Jews see this as another confirmation of the deeply held conviction that history isn't haphazard; events – even terrible ones – are part of a Divine plan and have spiritual meaning. The message of time is that everything has a rational purpose, even though we don't understand it.

The Laws of Tisha B'Av

As part of our mourning for the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel, we abstain from many pleasurable activities on the night and day of Av 9 — starting with sundown on the eve of the day before, and concluding with the following nightfall.

All adults – even pregnant and nursing women – fast on this day. One who is ill should consult with a rabbi. An ill person who is not fasting should refrain from eating delicacies and should eat only that which is absolutely necessary for his physical wellbeing.

Specifically, we do not:

* Wear leather footwear, or footwear that contains any leather (even if it is only a leather sole).
* Sit on a normal-height chair until midday. ("Halachic" midday is the halfway point between sunrise and sunset.)
* Bathe or wash oneself — "even to insert a finger in cold water."

Exceptions:

One who becomes soiled may rinse the affected area with cold water.

It is permitted to wash up after using the restroom.

When preparing food – for children, or for the post-fast meal – one may wash the food, even if it also, incidentally, washes the hands.

When ritually washing the hands in the morning, the water should be poured on the fingers only until the knuckle joints.

* Apply ointment, lotions or creams.
* It is permissible, however, to bathe a baby and apply ointments to his skin.
* Engage in marital relations or any form of intimacy.
* Send gifts, or even greet another with the customary "hello" or "how are you doing?"
* Engage in outings, trips or similar pleasurable activities.
* Wear fine festive clothing.

Order of the Day:
A Step-By-Step Guide to Tishah b'Av Observance

Afternoon of the Eighth of Av

The restriction against studying Torah – other than sections that discuss the destruction of the Temples – commences at midday on the eve of the fast.

Tachanun (the set of penitential prayers) is omitted from the afternoon prayer – as well as all the Tisha b'Av prayers.

The final meal consists of a hard-boiled egg and a piece of bread dipped in ashes. Shortly before the fast begins, we eat a "separation meal." This somber meal is not very plentiful — it follows a larger meal eaten a bit earlier. This final meal is eaten while sitting on the floor or a low stool. It consists of a piece of bread and a hard-boiled egg dipped in ashes, a symbol of mourning. Each individual recites Grace After Meals by themselves.

With sundown, all the laws of Tisha b'Av take effect.

Tisha b'Av Eve

In the synagogue, the curtain is removed from the Ark and the lights are dimmed. After the evening prayers, the Book of Lamentations (Eichah) is read. The leader reads aloud and the congregation reads along in an undertone. In some communities (not Chabad) Lamentations is read by the leader from a parchment scroll.

“Eicha” (Lamentations) is followed by the recitation of a few brief Kinot (elegies), the V'atah Kadosh (minus the verse "And this is My covenant") followed by Kaddish (minus the stanza of Tikvah – which is also omitted from the Kaddish recited at the end of the morning prayers).

Tisha b'Av Morning

When ritually washing the hands in the morning, pour water on your fingers only until the knuckle joints. While your fingers are still moist, you may wipe your eyes with them. It is not permitted to rinse out the mouth – or brush teeth – until after the fast.

Considering that we don't wear leather footwear on this day, the blessing "Who provided me with all my needs" – which primarily thanks G-d for providing us with shoes – is omitted from the morning blessings. Tallit and tefillin are not worn during the
The Three Weeks Period of Mourning

The Sephardic custom is to observe the stringencies regarding meat, wine and bathing only in the week of Tisha b’Av.

Some more observances:

* The Sanctification of the Moon is postponed until after Tisha b’Av.
* There is no law forbidding traveling during the Nine Days; however, it is customary to refrain from traveling (or engaging in any potentially perilous activity) during these days unless it is absolutely necessary.
* One may become engaged to be married during this period but no celebration should be held until after Tisha b’Av.

Note: All these restrictions are in addition to the restrictions that apply during all of the Three Weeks.

Shabbat Chazon

The Shabbat preceding the 9th of Av is called Shabbat Chazon — "Shabbat of the Vision." The Shabbat's reading from the Prophets begins with the words Chazon Yishayahu, the "vision of Isaiah" regarding the destruction of the Holy Temple. The legendary chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev said that on this special Shabbat every Jewish soul is shown a vision of the third Holy Temple.

The purpose of this vision is to arouse within every Jew a yearning to actually see this edifice which will be built by G-d, and to do as many mitzvot as possible in order to realize this dream. While this vision may not be sensed with the physical eyes, the soul certainly experiences this vision, and it affects the person on the subconscious level.

There is no mourning on Shabbat.

We try to moderate the sadness through participating in permissible celebrations. If possible, this week’s havdallah wine or grape juice should be given to a child — younger than bar/bat mitzvah age — to drink.

The Inner Dimension

"When the month of Av enters, we reduce our joy..." - Talmud, Taanit 26.

The entire month of Av is considered to be an inopportune time for Jews. Our Sages advised that a Jew who is scheduled to have a court hearing – or anything of a similar nature – against a gentile during this month should try to postpone it until after Av, or at least until after the Nine Days.

On the positive side, as we get closer and closer to the Messianic Era, when these days will be transformed from days of sadness to days of joy, we start to focus on the inner purpose of the destruction, which is to bring us to a higher level of sensitivity and spirituality, and ultimately to the rebuilding — with even greater grandeur and glory — of all that was destroyed.

We therefore try to moderate the sadness through participating in permissible celebrations. It is therefore Chabad custom to have someone complete a tractate of the Talmud each day of the Nine Days, in order to infuse these days with permissible joy.

Tisha B’Av:

A Historical Overview

The 9th of Av, Tisha b’Av, commemorates a list of catastrophes so severe it’s clearly a day specially cursed by G-d.

Picture this: The year is 1313 BCE. The Israelites are in the desert, recently having experienced the miraculous Exodus, and are now poised to enter the Promised Land. But first they dispatch a reconnaissance mission to assist in formulating a prudent battle strategy. The spies return on the eighth day of Av and report that the land is unconquerable. That night, the 9th of Av, the people cry. They insist that they’d rather go back. The Jews were shocked to realize that their Second Temple was destroyed the same day as the first.

One year after their conquest of Betar, the Romans lowered the Temple Mount, our nation's holiest site.

The Jews were expelled from England in 1290 CE on, you guessed it, Tisha b’Av. In 1492, the Golden Age of Spain came to a close when Queen Isabella and her husband Ferdinand ordered that the Jews be banished from the land. The edict of expulsion was signed on March 31, 1492, and the Jews were given exactly four months to put their affairs in order and leave the country. The Hebrew date on which no Jew was allowed any longer to remain in the land where he had enjoyed welcome and prosperity? Oh, by now you know it — the 9th of Av.

The Jews were expelled from England in 1290 CE on, you guessed it, Tisha B’Av. Ready for just one more? World War II and the Holocaust, historians conclude, was actually the long-drawn-out conclusion of World War I that began in 1914. And yes, amazingly enough, the First World War also began, on the Hebrew calendar, on the 9th...
The 9th of Av

morning services. Tefillin are referred to as our "glory" and on the Ninth of Av our glory is absent. Tzitzit are worn the entire day.

Those who follow Sephardic tradition insert the Aneinu passage in the amidah. The priestly blessing is omitted from the cantor's repetition. The Song of the Day and Ein k'Elkeinu are omitted at the end of the service.

The Torah reading in the morning is Deuteronomy 4:25-40, which speaks of the destruction of the Land of Israel. A chapter from Jeremiah (8:13-9:23), which also speaks of the destruction, is read as the Haftorah.

Tefillin are referred to as our "glory" and on the Ninth of Av our glory is absent. After the morning prayers, it is customary to read the Kinnot elegies.

Work is permitted on Tisha b'Av, but discouraged. On this day one's focus should be on mourning and repentance. If one must work, it should preferably begin after midday.

It is customary to give extra charity on every fast day.

Tisha b'Av Afternoon

It is customary to wait until midday before starting the food preparations for the post-fast meal. The intensity of the mourning lessens in the afternoon, as is evident from the relaxing of certain restrictions.

After midday, it is once again permitted to sit on chairs and benches of regular height.

In the synagogue, the Ark's curtain is restored to its place before the afternoon prayers. Men don their tallit and tefillin for the afternoon prayers. Before starting the afternoon prayers, it is customary to say those prayers omitted from the conclusion of the morning services.

Many have the custom to clean the house and wash the floors in anticipation of the Redemption. The Torah is read before the Amidah. The reading is Exodus 31:11-14; 34:1-10, which discusses the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident, how Moses successfully interceded on the Israelites' behalf and attained forgiveness for their sin. After the afternoon Torah reading, the special fast-day Haftorah, Isaiah 55:6–56:8, is read.

The sections of Nachem and Aneinu are added to the amidah. (Note: Aneinu is only recited by those who are actually fasting.)

Post Tisha b'Av

Before breaking the fast, one should ritually wash hands, this time covering the entire hand with water, but without reciting the blessing.

The Temple was set ablaze on the afternoon of the 9th of Av, and burned through the 10th. Therefore, the restrictions of the Nine Days (such as not eating meat, swimming, or laundering clothing) extend until midday of the 10th of Av.

However, if the Ninth of Av falls on a Thursday – in which case the tenth falls on Friday – one may wash and cut one's hair on Friday morning in honor of Shabbat.

May we be granted the abolition of these rules and all mourning, with the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the third Temple in Jerusalem, speedily, in our days!
Why Pray?

In every issue of the Warrior we try to share a practical Mitzvah that every reader can start observing or observe in a more meaningful way. Even though we already highlighted the commandment of Prayer in a past issue, we feel that this is an appropriate time to highlight this Mitzvah once again.

All of our lives have been turned upside down in the last few months. The only thing that is still intact is our trust and belief in G-d. The best way to connect and cleave to G-d is through prayer. Many of us have countless extra hours in the day that we never had before. Why not use those extra hours in the day for Prayer? Add one new prayer each day that you did not recite till now. If you always recited the morning blessings, recite the entire shacharit (morning prayer.) If you recited the entire morning prayer, start praying the afternoon prayer every day. If you are praying three times a day and also reading the Shema prayer before you go to bed, try studying Chassidic philosophy and meditating before you pray. We can always try to pray with more sincerity and fervor. There is no better way to connect to G-d and no better way to strengthen and deepen our relationship with G-d than through prayer. We are all apprehensive about what the future holds and none of us really have answers. One thing we do know, G-d does listen to our prayers. Give it a try!

What Is Jewish Prayer?

It can happen at any time of the day. Head lowered, we whisper a short prayer to G-d. In times of suffering and pain, or even when experiencing a temporary predicament, we turn to our Creator and request His assistance.

This is prayer in its most quintessential form. The Torah instructs us to reach out to G-d when experiencing hardship; the precise wording is immaterial — what’s important only is that this communiqué emanate from the heart.

On a very basic level, prayer expresses our belief in G-d. Our recognition that we are dependent on His beneficence, and that, as the one who controls all, it is within His ability to extricate us from our hardship. And as such, in a time of need — no matter how trivial the need may seem — we turn to the one whom we know can help.

The Torah refers to prayer as “the service of the heart,” an act suffused with love and reverence. Prayer is about a child approaching his loving parent. In fact, the medieval sage Maimonides writes that “prayer without concentration is akin to a lifeless body.”

Chabad philosophy, however, based on the teachings of Kabbalah, expounds upon the idea of prayer as more than just a vehicle for presenting our needs before G-d. It is actually our primary means of connecting our consciousness to the divine, an island in time when our souls are unleashed, free to soar to heavenly heights. Such prayer leaves an indelible refining impact on the entire day.

Much of Chabad literature is devoted to discussing the nature and power of prayer, meditations for before and during prayer, and the critical importance of investing one’s soul in this daily service of the heart.

History of Prayer

Originally, the commandment to pray did not include any specific times, nor was there a defined text. Every individual chose his or her own words with which to address the Creator. There was, though, a standard format for prayer: praise for G-d, followed by asking Him for all one’s needs, followed by expressing gratitude for all G-d has done for us — both collectively and individually.

Following the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in 423 BCE, the Jews were exiled to Babylon for seventy years. The new generation born in the Diaspora was, for the most part, not fluent in Hebrew — the “Holy Tongue.” In fact, many spoke a broken language — a combination of Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and more — preventing them from properly formulating their own prayers.

To address this issue, Ezra the Scribe — together with the Men of the Great Assembly, consisting of 120 prophets...
and sages — established a standard text for prayer in Hebrew. They also instituted three times for daily prayer: morning, afternoon and night.

The three prayers (a fourth is added after the morning prayers on Shabbat and Jewish holidays) center around the Amida, a series of nineteen blessings. The morning and evening prayers also incorporate the Shema, as per the commandment to recite it morning and night. Selected Psalms, blessings and prayers complete the picture.

By the 2nd century CE, the prayers we know today were formulated.

This all is in addition to the personal, heartfelt prayers and conversations we are encouraged to constantly initiate with G-d.

Communal Prayer

Although one may pray whenever and wherever (provided that it is an appropriate location for an exchange with the Creator), Jewish tradition encourages communal prayer.

The reason is twofold: a) A venue designated for prayer is one where G-d is more readily accessible — in fact, a synagogue is considered a miniature replica of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where G-d’s presence was prevalent. b) Joining with others gives each individual the power of the community, and their collective deeds and merits.

Why Do We Pray?

We pray because our body requires nourishment, health, safety, comfort. We pray to acknowledge our dependency upon, our appreciation of, and our gratitude to the Source of all the needs, joys and achievements of life.

We pray because our soul is lonely. A spark of the Divine fire, it has journeyed to a world heavy and dark with "matter" -- with things, forces and objects that shut forth their own reality, obfuscating their Source. So the spark yearns for the fire and strives to become reabsorbed in it. Eagerly it awaits the times set aside for prayer -- those precious daily moments when the person it inhabits ceases to commune with the world and communes with his or her Creator.

So a person praying is a standing paradox, a swaying contradiction, a self divided against itself. Both body and soul are praying. The body is praying for life and existence. The soul is praying to escape life, to transcend existence.

And yet, as prayer progresses, a certain harmony emerges. As the soul prays, climbing the heavens and shedding the husks of selfishness that encumber it with "needs" and hold it distinct from its source, the body (who is praying on the same page -- there's no escaping that) learns that spirituality, too, is a need; that transcendent strivings are also a pleasure; that union with G-d is also an achievement. And the soul, who's praying on the same page as the body (there's no escaping that, either) learns that life, too, is Divine; that existence is also a way of fusing with G-d; that achievement can be the ultimate self-abnegation, if one's achievements are harnessed to a higher, G-dly end.

Why do we pray? Because the body needs the soul and the soul needs the body, and both need to be made aware that the other's need is also their own.

That, ultimately is the essence of prayer: to know our needs, understand their source, comprehend their true objectives. To direct our minds and hearts to He who implanted them within us, defined their purpose, and provides us with the means to fulfill them.

If G-d Knows Best, What's the Point of Prayer?

Question:

I'm a bit confused about the idea of praying to G-d to help us in a certain situation or provide us with something. If G-d has made a person's situation a certain way, then He wants it to be this way. He knows this is good for that person. So then, why should a person pray for the situation to change?

Answer:

Yes, the whole concept of praying is confusing. We trust in G-d that He is good and does everything for the good. We believe that He has perfect knowledge of everything and that everything is under His control. And we ask Him to change things and make them good. Yes, it seems a contradiction.

So think of it like this: G-d wants people to pray to Him. Something like a parent wants a child to pick up the phone and say,"Hi, Mom and Dad." More than that, He wants things to progress in His world through mutual consultation. He wants that we should be involved in understanding what's good for us and bringing it about -- no matter how much better His own understanding and ability is than our understanding and ability.

That's what prayer is all about: Communion between you and G-d. Think of prayer as G-d talking to Himself -- through you. In prayer, you and G-d are one.

So ask for everything you need. But keep in mind Who it is that you are asking. And ask yourself what you are doing in return. What kind of a partner are you?
The Meaning of Prayer

"As for me, may my prayer unto You, O G-d, be in an acceptable time; O G-d, in the abundance of Your mercy, answer me in the truth of Your salvation." - Psalms 69:14

The Hebrew word “Tefilah” is generally translated into English as the word "prayer." But this is not an accurate translation, for to pray means to beg, beseech, implore, and the like, for which we have a number of Hebrew words which more accurately convey this meaning. Our daily prayers are not simply requests addressed to G-d to give us our daily needs and nothing more. Of course, such requests are also included in our prayers, but by and large our prayers are much more than that, as we shall see below.

Prayer is a commandment of G-d; 1 G-d has commanded us to pray to Him, and to Him alone. In times of distress, we must turn to G-d for help; in times of comfort, we must express our gratitude to G-d; and when all goes well with us, we must still pray to G-d daily that He continue to show us His mercy and grant us our daily needs.

In our prayers to G-d we often address Him as our Merciful Father, or as our Father in Heaven, for G-d regards us, and we regard ourselves, as His children. The question may be asked, Why do we have to pray to our Father in Heaven for our daily needs? Does G-d not know our needs even better than we our-selves? Is G-d not by His very nature, good and kind, and always willing to do us good? After all, children do not "pray" to their loving parents to feed them, and clothe them, and protect them; why should we pray to our Heavenly Father for these things?

The answer to these questions is not hard to find after a little reflection. In fact it has been amply explained to us by our great Sages, including Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon):

We are told to offer up prayers to G-d, in order to establish firmly the true principle that G-d takes notice of our ways, that He can make them successful if we serve Him, or disastrous if we disobey Him; that success and failure are not the result of chance or accident.

Like all other commandments which G-d has commanded us to do, not for His sake but for ours, He has commanded us to pray to Him for our sake. G-d does not need our prayer; He can do without our prayers, but we cannot do without our prayers. It is good for us to acknowledge our dependence on G-d for our very life, our health, our daily bread, and our general welfare. And we should do so every day, and many times a day. We must often remind ourselves that our life and happiness are a gift from our Merciful Creator, for we should then try to be worthy of G-d's kindnesses and favors to us. G-d does not owe us anything; yet He gives us everything. We should try to be the same way towards our fellow-men and grant favors freely. We should express our gratitude to G-d not merely in words, but in deeds: by obeying His commands and living our daily life the way G-d wants us to do, especially as it is all for our own good.

Knowing that G-d is good and that nothing is impossible for Him to do, we can go about our life with a deep sense of confidence and security. Even in times of distress we will not despair, knowing that in some way (best known to G-d) whatever happens to us is for our good, a blessing in disguise. We do not like to suffer, so we pray to G-d to help us out of our distress, and grant us the good that is not hidden or disguised, but the good that is obviously good, obvious even to our fleshy eyes and limited understanding. We gain strength, courage and hope in our trust in G-d. Our daily prayers strengthen our trust in G-d. In G-d We Trust has been our Jewish motto since we first became a people. Its adoption by the American people when it became a "nation under G-d," commendable though it is, is, of course, not original.

A Time Of Self-Judgment

Our Sages declare that the ladder which our father Jacob saw in his dream, with angels of G-d "going up and coming down on it," was also the symbol of prayer. By showing the ladder to Jacob
Why Pray?

in his dream, a ladder which "stood on the earth and reached into the heaven, our Sages explain, G-d showed Jacob that prayer is like a ladder which connects the earth with the heaven, man with G-d. The meaningful words of prayer, the good resolutions which prayer brings forth, are transformed into angels which go up to G-d, and G-d sends down angels with blessings in return. That is why Jacob saw in his dream that angels were "going up and coming down," although one would have expected angels to come down first and then go up again.

Thus, what we said about prayer in answer to the question: "Why do we pray?" is but the first step on the "ladder" of prayer. On a higher level prayer has to do with things that are higher than the daily material needs, namely spiritual things.

The Hebrew word tefilah comes from the verb pallel, meaning "to judge." We use the reflexive verb lehitpallel ("to pray"), which also means "to judge oneself." Thus, the time of prayer is the time of self-judgment and self-evaluation. When a person addresses himself to G-d and prays for His blessings, he must inevitably search his heart and examine himself whether he measures up to the standards of daily conduct which G-d had prescribed for man to follow. If he is not one who fools himself, he will be filled with humility, realizing that he hardly merits the blessings and favors for which he is asking. This is why we stress in our prayers G-d's infinite goodness and mercies, and pray to G-d to grant us our heart's desires not because we merit them, but even though we do not deserve them. This is also why our prayers, on week-days, contain a confession of sins which we may have committed knowingly or unknowingly. We pray for G-d's forgiveness, and resolve to better ourselves. Prayers help us to lead a better life in every respect, by living more fully the way of the Torah and Mitzvoth which G-d commanded us.

Avodah — Service

On a still higher level, prayer becomes avodah, "service." The Torah commands us "to serve G-d with our hearts," and our Sages say: "What kind of service is 'service of the heart'?"—it is prayer." In this sense, prayer is meant to purify our hearts and our nature.

The plain meaning of avodah is "work." We work with a raw material and convert it into a refined and finished product. In the process, we remove the impurities, or roughness, of the raw material, whether it be a piece of wood or a rough diamond, and make it into a thing of usefulness or beauty. The tanner, for example, takes raw hide and by various processes converts it into a fine leather. The parchment on which a Sefer-Torah is written, or a Mezuzah, or Tefillin, is made of the hide of a kosher animal. So is raw wool full of grease and other impurities, but through various stages of "work" it is made into a fine wool, from which we can make not only fine woolens for our clothes, but also a Tallith, or Tzitzith.

The Jewish people have been likened in the Torah to soil and earth, and have been called G-d's "land of desire." The saintly Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidut, explained it this way: The earth is full of treasures, but the treasures are often buried deep. It is necessary to dig for them; and when you discover them, you still have to clear away the impurities, refine them or polish them, as in the case of gold, or a diamond, and the like. So is every Jew full of wonderful treasures of character — modesty, kindness and other natural traits, but sometimes they are buried deep and covered up by "soil" and "dust," which have to be cleared away.

We speak of a person of good character as a "refined" person, or a person of "refined" character. It entails an effort, and very often a hard effort, to overcome such things as pride, anger, jealousy and similar bad traits, which may be quite "natural" but still unbecoming for a human being, least of all for a Jew.

Tefilah, in the sense of avodah, is the "refinery" where the impurities of character are done away with. These bad character traits stem from the "animal" soul in man, and are "natural" to it. But we are endowed with a "Divine" soul, which is a spark of G-dliness itself, and the treasury of all the wonderful qualities which make a man superior to an animal. During prayer, our Divine soul speaks to G-d, and even the animal soul is filled with holiness. We realize that we stand before the Holy One, blessed be He, and the whole material world with all its pains and pleasures seems to melt away. We become aware of the real things that really matter and are truly important, and even as we pray for life, health and sustenance, we think of these things in their deeper sense: a life that is worthy to be called "living"; health not only physical, but above all spiritual; sustenance — the things that truly sustain us in this world and in the world to come, namely the Torah and Mitzvot.

We feel cleansed and purified by such "service," and when we return to our daily routine, the feeling of purity and holiness lingers on and raises our daily conduct to a level which is fitting for a member of the people called a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Tefilah — Attachment

The highest level on the "ladder" of prayer is reached when we are so
Why Pray?

inspired as to want nothing but the feeling of attachment with G-d. On this level Tefilah is related to the verb (used in Mishnaic Hebrew) tofel, to "attach," or "join," or "bind together," as two pieces of a broken vessel are pieced together to make it whole again.

Our soul is "truly a part of G-dliness," and it therefore longs to be reunited with, and reabsorbed in, G-dliness; just as a small flame when it is put close to a larger flame is absorbed into the larger flame. We may not be aware of this longing, but it is there nevertheless. Our soul has, in fact, been called the "candle of G-d." The flame of a candle is restless, striving upwards, to break away, as it were, from the wick and body of the candle; for such is the nature of fire — to strive upwards. Our soul, too, strives upwards, like the flame of the candle. Such is its nature, whether we are conscious of it, or not. This is also one of the reasons why a Jew naturally sways while praying. For prayer is the means whereby we attach ourselves to G-d, with a soulful attachment of "spirit to spirit," and in doing so our soul, as it were, flutters and soars upward, to be united with G-d.

Let us consider this idea a little closer.

Every Mitzvah which G-d has commanded us to do, and which we perform as a sacred commandment, attaches us to G-d. The word Mitzvah is related to the (Aramaic) word tzavta, "togetherness," or "company." In English, too, we have the word to "enjoin," which means to "command," for the commandment is the bond that joins together the person commanded with the person commanding, no matter how far apart the commander and the commanded may be in distance, rank or position. When a king commands a most humble servant to do something, this immediately establishes a bond between the two. The humble servant feels greatly honored that the king has taken notice of him and has given him something to do, and that he, an insignificant person, can do something to please the great king. It makes him eager to be worthy of the king's attention and favor.

If this is so in the case of every Mitzvah, it is even more so in the case of prayer. For nothing brings man closer to G-d than prayer, when prayer is truly the outpouring of the soul and, therefore, makes for an "attachment of spirit to spirit," as mentioned earlier. If any Mitzvah brings us closer to G-d, prayer (on the level of which we are speaking) is like being embraced by G-d. It gives us a wonderful spiritual uplift and blissfulness, than which there is no greater pleasure and fulfillment.

Prayer, we said, is like a "ladder" of many rungs. To get to the top of it, we must start at the bottom and steadily rise upwards. In order to be able to do so, our prayers have been composed prophetically by our saintly prophets and sages of old, and have been ordered also like a "ladder," steadily leading us to greater and greater inspiration. We must, therefore, become familiar with our prayers: first of all their plain meaning, then their deeper meaning, and finally, with the whole "order" of our service.

In the Zohar (where the inner meaning of the Torah is revealed) and in Chabad philosophy it is explained further that each of the three Patriarchs represented a particular quality which they introduced into the service of G-d. Abraham served G-d with love; Isaac — with awe; Jacob — with mercy. Not that each lacked the qualities of the others, but each had a particular quality which...
Why Pray?

was more in evidence. Thus Abraham distinguished himself especially in the quality of kindness and love, while Isaac excelled especially in the quality of strict justice and reverence, while Jacob inherited both these qualities, bringing out a new quality which combined the first two into the well-balanced and lasting quality of truth and mercy. We, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, have inherited all these three great qualities of our Patriarchs, and this enables us to serve G-d and pray to Him with love and fear (awe) and mercy. The quality of mercy enters when we realize that our soul is a part of G-dliness, and we feel pity for it because it is so often distracted from G-d by the material aspects of the daily life.

When the Torah was given to us at Mount Sinai, our way of life was set out for us by G-d. Torah means "teaching," "instruction," "guidance"; for the Torah teaches us our way of life in every detail of our daily life. The Torah contains 613 commandments. Among them is the command to "serve G-d with all our heart and all our soul." How do we serve G-d with our heart? By praying to Him. In doing so, we fulfill not only the commandment of praying to G-d, but also other commandments, such as to love G-d and to fear Him, which are separate commandments.

During the first one thousand years, or so, since the time of Moses, there was no set order of prayer. Each individual was duty-bound to pray to G-d every day, but the form of prayer and how many times a day to pray was left to the individual.

There was, however, a set order of service in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, known as the Beit Hamikdosh, in connection with the daily sacrifices, morning and evening, while the evening sacrifice extended into the night. On special days, such as Shabbos, Rosh-Chodesh and Festivals, there were also "additional" (musaf) sacrifices. Accordingly, it was perhaps not unusual for some Jews to pray three times a day, morning, evening and night, in their own way. King David, for example, declared that he prayed three times daily, and Daniel (in Babylon) prayed three times daily facing in the direction of Jerusalem. There is evidence that there were, even during the time of the first Temple in Jerusalem, public places of prayer, called Beit Ha'am, which the Chaldeans (Babylonians) destroyed when they destroyed Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

After the Holy Temple was destroyed and the Jews were led into captivity in Babylon, Jews continued to gather and pray in congregation. The places of prayer became like "small sanctuaries" during the years of exile, the children who were born and brought up in Babylon lacked adequate knowledge of the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) and spoke a mixed language. Therefore, when the Jews returned to their homeland after the seventy years’ exile was over, Ezra the Scribe together with the Men of the Great Assembly (consisting of prophets and sages, 120 members in all) fixed the text of the daily prayer (Shemone Esrei — the "Eighteen Benedictions"), and made it a permanent institution and duty in Jewish life to recite this prayer three times daily. Ever since then it became part of Jewish Law (Halachah) for each and every Jew to pray this ordained and fixed order of prayer three times daily, corresponding to the daily sacrifices in the Holy Temple, with additional (musaf) prayers on Shabbat, Rosh-Chodesh and Festivals, and a special "closing" prayer (Neilah) on Yom Kippur.

Thus, the main parts of the daily prayers were formulated by our Sages. These included the Shema prayer and Shemone Esrei, which still are the main parts of our morning and evening prayers, while the Shemone Esrei is the main part of the Minchah service also. The daily Psalm (from Tehillim) which used to be sung by the Levites in the Holy Temple, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, became part of the morning prayer. Other Psalms of David were included in the morning prayer, and special benedictions before and after the Shema were added. By the time the Mishnah was recorded by Rabbi Judah the Prince (about the year 3910 — some 500 years after Ezra), and especially by the time the Talmud was completed (some 300 years later, or about 1500 years ago), the basic order of our prayers, as we know them now, had been formulated.

May your prayers always be accepted by Heaven!
The WEEK IN REVIEW

MATOT

Torah portion for week of: July 12-18

Parashat Matot covers three main subjects: the laws of vows and oaths, the war against Midian, and the settlement of the tribes of Reuben and Gad.

The second and third of these three fit well into the historical flow of the Torah. The war against Midian is the third and final act in the drama of Israel’s confrontation with the Moab-Midian alliance whose story began in parashat Balak. The settlement of the two tribes of Reuben and Gad is the next phase of the conquest of the Land of Israel, begun at the end of parashat Chukat and continuing through the Book of Joshua and beyond.

What, then, of the laws of vows and oaths? Like the other legal passages of the Torah, we would expect to find these laws in Exodus or Leviticus. So why are they in the Torah, we would expect to find these laws here? It must be that these laws have a particular relevance to the subject of conquering and settling the Land of Israel. This will be clear when we review the events that preceded this parashah and which lead into it, as follows.

As we explained previously, the Jewish people’s slide into the idolatry of Pe’or and their harlotry with the Moabite-Midianite women actually began as a misunderstanding of the way they were meant to be involved in the physical world. They knew that their parents’ generation had been sentenced to live in the desert for forty years (after the incident of the spies) because they had shunned the challenges of such involvement. Standing at the threshold of the Promised Land, they were poised to accept this challenge and had resolved not to repeat their parents’ errors; they were ready to attack the materiality of the physical world and infuse it with God-consciousness.

However, their impetuous enthusiasm led them to err, and they overlooked the need to be cautious. As Eve had done with the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they fell into the trap of overestimating their holiness and thinking that their sublime spiritual consciousness and zeal made them invincible and immune to the machinations of evil. They knew that the purpose of life is to make all of reality into a home for God, and they had learned from Jethro’s conversion and Balaam’s prophecies that in order for this to happen, even the lowest, most anti-holy elements of reality must be elevated into holiness. Thus, they reasoned that they, too, must experience these dangerous but powerful energies of lust and unholy spirituality—in order, of course, to elevate them back to their source in holiness.

But of course, they were wrong. If one is to throw caution to the wind and risk everything, it should be in the opposite direction, to combat evil, as Pinchas graphically demonstrated. Although we should not shun the challenge of engaging the materiality of this world directly, we must be duly aware of its potential to divert us and corrupt our intentions. Hence the pertinence of the laws of vows and oaths: through these laws a person can set up boundaries for himself where he feels they are needed, as we will explain further on.

The next subject of this parashah, the war with Midian, can now be seen as a logical follow-through from the laws of vows and oaths. Those laws are the spiritual correction of the error of Pe’or, and the battle with Midian is the effort to uproot the source of this error.

The settlement of the tribes of Reuben and Gad is also a development of the same theme. These tribes wished to settle in the territory that Moses had conquered from Sichon and Og, on the east side of the Jordan River. God did not intend the Jews to settle this land at this point in history. These tribes reasoned, however, that the holiness of the Land of Israel proper was greater than the land outside its boundaries; therefore, it was crucial to elevate the unholy land as well. Their argument was therefore a variation on the same theme as before. This time, however, they were partially right, as Moses saw. Their understanding is an important lesson for us regarding our relationship to the physical world.

All three subjects of parashat Matot, then, are relevant to the impending entry into the Land of Israel. On the personal level as well, they are relevant to each of us individually in our encounter with the material world and to our generation collectively, standing as we are on the threshold of the messianic Redemption.

This explains how the name of the parashah, Matot, can be justifiably used as the name for the entire parashah. The word itself means “tribes,” but there are two words used in the Torah for “tribe,” the other one being shevet. Interestingly, both synonyms for “tribe” are also synonyms for “tree branch.” Just as branches stem from a tree trunk, a “tribe” is a branch or division of the people rooted in its common ancestor (in this case, Jacob).

The difference between the two synonyms is that while shevet refers to a soft, pliable twig, mateh (the singular of matot) refers to a hard stick. The shevet owes its pliability to the fact that it is freshly cut from the tree (or even still connected to it), in contrast to the mateh, which has long been severed from the tree and has therefore lost its elasticity. Thus, shevet refers to the Jewish tribe (or individual Jew) when it is consciously connected to its source, whereas mateh refers to the same tribe (or individual Jew) when it is not so consciously connected.

Spiritually, shevet can be considered to refer to the soul before it descended into the body, when it was fully conscious of Divinity and its own connection to its source. Mateh would then refer to the soul...
The WEEK IN REVIEW - Matot/Masei

as it has entered the body and lost this conscious connection — at least temporarily — and been charged with elevating the body and the portion of reality under its purview. In such a state, we must evince the inflexibility of a hardened stick in our devotion to principles and resistance to evil. If successful, we can face the challenges of life confidently and proceed to fulfill our purpose on earth and make reality into the home for God it was intended to be.

MASEI

Torah portion for week of: July 12-18

At the end of parashat Chukat, the Israelites arrived at the threshold of the Promised Land, “by the Jordan opposite Jericho.” The ensuing three parashot — Balak, Pinchas, and Matot — describe the events that took place while the Israelites were encamped at their final stop, most prominently the encounter with Moab and Midian.

This parashah, Masei, the last of the Book of Numbers, opens with a recapitulation of the Israelite’s entire trek from Egypt until their final camp, and it takes its name (which means “the journeys of”) from the opening words of this recapitulation. This summary would seem to be a fitting way to close the book. But the fact that the text continues after this review — and indeed, that the entire Book of Deuteronomy is yet to come — indicates that it serves rather as the demarcation between the story of the sojourn in the desert and the preparations for entering the Land of Israel. After looking back at what was, we look forward to what is about to be.

And indeed, the remainder of Masei deals with specific instructions pertaining to the conquest of the land: driving out its idolatrous inhabitants, delineating its borders, designating who will divide it up, specifying where the Levites will live and the special role their cities will play, and detailing additional laws of inheritance.

So it would seem that the opening subject of the parashah is entirely different from the rest of its contents. If the opening review of the Israelites’ itinerary is the end of the story of the desert, perhaps it should have been placed at the end of the previous parashah. The present parashah would then be entirely devoted to the life the people would lead after crossing the Jordan.

The fact that, despite what we might think, the itinerary is part of the look ahead, and actually introduces it, implies that it is at least as relevant to what is to come as it is to what was.

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The distinguishing feature of human life is change. True, lower life forms also grow, learn, and adapt, but once they reach maturity, they remain what they are. Even the forms of life above us — the angels — are static: every angel is the eternal, unchanging personification of a specific level of Divine consciousness or emotion. Only human beings are capable of changing their way of looking at life, of progressing to higher, more Divinely conscious levels of living based on their expanded understanding of reality.

If this spiritual growth is the unique property of human existence, it follows that in order for us to remain human and avoid becoming fossilized as a stagnant animal (or even angel!), this process must go on continuously. We must always strive to expand our spiritual horizons and seek higher levels of living.

The secret of life, then, is to keep moving, to keep journeying upward: never to look at progress only as a phenomenon of the past, but to see it primarily as an integral part of the future.

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As we have seen, the archetype of constrained consciousness is the Land of Egypt. The Hebrew name for Egypt (Mitzraim) means “limits” and “boundaries” (meitzarim). The Exodus from Egypt is thus the archetype for transcending limits in the spiritual life. But here we find an instructive nuance in the way the Israelites’ itinerary is introduced: “These are the journeys of the Israelites who left the Land of Egypt.” This phrase seems to imply that all the journeys were from the Land of Egypt, while technically only the first journey was from Egypt.

By introducing the entire itinerary this way, the Torah teaches us that whenever we go out of Egypt, whenever we transcend one level of life, we should consider our new, expanded level of consciousness a new “Egypt,” a level of constricted awareness relative to where we want to go next. In this way, we are constantly going out of Egypt.

Furthermore, rather than simply listing the stops on the journey, the account is phrased in a way that emphasizes how the Israelites left every place they stopped at: “[They] journeyed from Rameses and camped at Sukot. They journeyed from Sukot and camped at Eitam.... They journeyed from Eitam....” This implies that every progression from level to level must be a quantum leap. It is not enough to just enhance or ascend at our present level; each leg of the journey should be a complete departure from the previous way we conceived of God, of life, and of ourselves.

In this context, it is particularly instructive to realize that not everything that happened along this journey from Egypt to the threshold of the Promised Land was altogether positive. At quite a few stops, the Israelites fell backwards, even retreated, and learned the lessons of Divine living the hard way. Nonetheless, they are all called “journeys”; in the long run they all contributed to the final arrival. This teaches us that in order to progress in life, we must learn how to see every regression as a lesson in how to progress further, and thereby turn every failure into a success.
This is possible because, despite the imperative to progress continually, there are certain things that should not change. This is the lesson we learned in the previous parashah, Matot. These basic constants — our fundamental beliefs and our resistance to evil — are the bedrock of our spiritual lives, and give us the stability on which we can base our continuous ascent. In particular, we can survive our falls when we realize that they are all orchestrated by Divine providence; we fall specifically in those areas of life where God sees we need to ascend; the rest of our life remains intact, providing the framework we need to put ourselves back together.

These lessons were particularly pertinent when the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land. The safe and sequestered life of the desert, of seclusion in a totally spiritual environment, naturally encourages spiritual growth. Of course, it is possible to stagnate in a spiritual environment as well, but the main challenge to remaining spiritually alive is in the settled land of mundane, material living. It is therefore fitting to make this point just as our sights become focused on working the land across the Jordan River, so that we remember throughout our lives, and give us the stability, vision, and the courage to face the challenges we will face in our mundane lives to strive and progress constantly toward ever higher levels of Divine consciousness. By ascending the ladder of spiritual growth ourselves and helping others make the same climb, we actualize the lessons we learned in the desert and successfully meet the great challenge of making the world into God’s home.

DEVARIM

Torah portion for week of: July 19-25

The Book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell address to the Jewish people. The historical necessity for the creation of the Jewish people was laid out in the Book of Genesis; the story of how this people came to be was told in the Book of Exodus; the nature of its unique relationship with God was detailed in the Book of Leviticus; and the issues that arose when this relationship was put to the test were resolved in the Book of Numbers. All that remains now, it would seem, is for Moses to sum things up and perhaps give some final instructions for the conquest and occupation of the Promised Land.

Yet, the Book of Deuteronomy is similar in length to the other books of the Torah. This in itself indicates that Deuteronomy will not be a mere summation but will contain significant content in its own right.

There are, in fact, two intertwined and overlapping strata of content in Moses’ farewell address. The first comprises his exhortations to the Jewish people to remain loyal to God and to the teachings of His Torah; the second is a review of much of the legal subject matter contained in the preceding books. Although we might expect the first type of material to appear in a farewell address, why was it necessary to rephrase so much of the legal material that had apparently been clearly stated before?

Another striking feature of the Book of Deuteronomy is its literary form. Unlike the preceding four books, in Deuteronomy (with the exception of just a few passages at the beginning and end), Moses speaks in the first person. The phrase we have heard continuously in the preceding books — “And God spoke to Moses, saying…” — is almost entirely absent from Deuteronomy.

This naturally raises the question of the theological status of this book. The sages tell us that although Moses transmitted the first four books from God verbatim and Deuteronomy “in his own name,” nevertheless, even in the latter case “the Divine Presence spoke from his mouth.” In other words, the Book of Deuteronomy is no less Divine than the first four books of the Torah, but whereas the first four books are God’s words transmitted directly by Moses, Deuteronomy is God’s words transmitted through Moses. But if this is the case, why the sudden change in literary form between the first four books and the final one?

The answer to both these questions hinges on the fact that this book is addressed to the generation that will enter the Land of Israel. The abrupt change in lifestyle—from a nation of nomads sustained by God’s supernatural protection into a nation of farmers who must work the land—called for a practical restatement of God’s hitherto abstract teachings. The generation of the desert had been nourished with miracles, beginning with the ten plagues and the exodus from Egypt, through the splitting of the sea, to the revelation at Mount Sinai, the manna, the well of Miriam, and the protective clouds of glory. Their perspective on life had thus been elevated to a level quite above and beyond the ordinary; God’s normally invisible hand in nature had become a manifest reality for them. They were thus able to relate to the Torah in a concomitantly abstract, spiritual way, and that is how it was transmitted to them.

All of this was about to change. True, the supernatural presence of God would remain manifest in the Tabernacle, but God’s hand in the parameters of day-to-day life was about to be veiled in the garb of nature.

This transition was, of course, a natural and essential part of achieving God’s purpose on earth: to transform it into a holy place, in which not nature but God is understood to be the driving force. Nature is but God’s instrument, subject to His will, rather than an immutable, unchanging force that determines the course of events. In order for the façade of nature to be torn away, humanity, led by the Jewish people, had to invest itself into the natural order and, in that context, sustain and retain consciousness of God, revealing the infinite within the finite.

Still, such a descent in God-consciousness, even for the sake of achieving a higher level, is not without its risks. We saw how these risks frightened the spies, were misinterpreted by Korach, and were over-romanticized by the tribes of Reuben and Gad. The Jews about to cross the Jordan...
were understandably apprehensive about their ability to face the challenge.

Moses was even more realistic: “I know that after my death you will act corruptly and stray from the path I have commanded you.” There was no doubt that the transition into the real world would entail inevitable lapses in both the individual’s and the nation’s Divine consciousness and commitment.

Therefore, it was necessary to describe the mechanism for repairing, restoring, and renewing the relationship between God and His people. This device is teshuvah (literally, “return”), the process that God set in place allowing and providing for the Jew to attain a second innocence. It is the eternal promise that sincere efforts backed by sincere intentions will always triumph over all obstacles in our relationship with Him.

Essential to the process of teshuvah is that the individual restore his appreciation of the Torah’s relevance in his life. The underlying rationale behind any lapse in Divine consciousness or commitment is that in some way or some context the Torah is not relevant.

This is why it was necessary for the Book of Deuteronomy to be transmitted in the first person. By communicating the message of Deuteronomy via the voice of Moses, God was telling us that even while remaining faithful to the Torah’s objective truths, we must see its subjective relevance to every individual and in every generation.

Moses was the archetypal intermediary between God and man. His direct communication with God had made him quite at home in the spiritual dimension, but even while he was on Mount Sinai he appreciated physicality enough to be able to refute the angels who sought to keep the Torah in heaven. An intermediary, however, can transmit the message he is given in either of two ways: he can either convey it verbatim, serving as a transparent conduit or funnel; or he can absorb it, and thus be able to “translate” it into terms more readily understood by the recipients.

In transmitting the first four books of the Torah, it was enough for Moses to act as the former type of intermediary; the exalted level of the generation of the desert allowed this. When he transmitted the Book of Deuteronomy, however, the audience had changed. Moses now had to become the latter type of intermediary in order to ensure that God’s message be fully communicated.

In order to do this, Moses in a certain sense had to attain a greater selflessness than was necessary when transmitting the first four books. In order that mediating God’s words through his voice not involve interposing his ego, it was crucial that his sense of self be absolutely dissolved in his awareness of God. Only by “existing” within God’s essence, so to speak, could Moses paradoxically be both there enough to serve as an intermediary yet not there enough to serve as a transparent conduit for God’s words.

In this sense, the first-person narrative of Deuteronomy indicates not a lesser Divinity than the other four books but a greater one, for the “I” of Deuteronomy is no less God’s than Moses’!

The same applies to us all when setting about uncovering the Torah’s relevance: our success is predicated on our eliminating our egotistic motives from the process.

The Book of Deuteronomy is thus a lesson in keeping the Torah alive and relevant, the means by which we can recommence the study of the Torah on a new level of understanding. By ensuring that the Torah remain eternally relevant, we can read it from an always deeper, fresher, newer perspective, and thereby continually deepen, freshen, and renew our relationship with God.

Teshuvah is a three-stage process: first, we need to recognize what we have done wrong (and articulate this recognition); next, we need to feel remorse for having done what we did; finally, we need to resolve not to repeat our behavior. It is only natural, therefore, that the first parashah of the book whose whole subject teshuvah begin with rebuke designed to make us recognize the gravity of our misdeeds and missed opportunities. Therefore, Moses reviewed with the people the events that were crucial to their process of teshuvah, even those events that had occurred relatively recently and were most likely still fresh in their memories.

Nevertheless, Moses’ rebuke is an object lesson in the proper approach to repentance. Although Moses did not omit any detail that could have driven home the need for teshuvah, he took care to mention each detail firstly as vaguely as possible, in order to preserve the people’s dignity and self-esteem; and secondly, always in the context of their great promise, emphasizing how far they fell short of their potential rather than how terribly they failed.

This perspective, coming as it does at the opening of the book, sets the tone for the “rebuke” that will continue throughout the entire book, even including the dire threats we will hear in its course. Candid and brutal honesty couched in terms that nonetheless convey deep and sincere respect is the surest way to reach encourage both ourselves and others to repent, to experience true teshuvah, and thereby renew ourselves and our relationship with God in the deepest way possible.

**VAETCHANAN**

*Week of: July 26 - Aug. 1*

As we have pointed out, the Book of Deuteronomy is in effect a restatement of the first four books of the Torah, couched in such a way as to make them relevant for the generation that was about to enter the Land of Israel. As such, the first parashah of Deuteronomy, parashat Devarim, parallels Genesis, the first book of the Torah. Just as the Book of Genesis describes the historical background for the Torah in general, detailing the necessity for the creation of the Jewish people, so does parashat Devarim describe the historical background for the
The restatement of the Torah in the Book of Deuteronomy, detailing the events that necessitated the forty-year detainment in the desert and the rise of a new generation that would enter the land.

The present parashah, parashat Va'etchanan, parallels Exodus, the second book of the Torah. The Book of Exodus laid the theological underpinnings of the Jewish people's existence: their distinction from other peoples (the Exodus), their unique covenant with God and attendant belief system (the Giving of the Torah), and their purpose as a people (to make the world a home for God, as encapsulated in the Tabernacle). In a parallel manner, parashat Va'etchanan describes the spiritual uniqueness of the new generation (as we will discuss presently), restates the covenant with God on their level (the repetition of the Ten Commandments), and transforms the imperative to make the world God's home into the basic, central statement of Judaism: the Shema.

This explains why, in parashat Va'etchanan, Moses recounts historical events that preceded those he reviewed in parashat Devarim. Although the events reviewed in parashat Devarim took place later chronologically, in terms of the thematic development of the Book of Deuteronomy they come first: they provide the rationale for the repetition of the drama of Mount Sinai and the Giving of the Torah that forms the subject of parashat Va'etchanan.

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Parashat Va'etchanan opens with Moses' description of how, at the end of the forty-year detour in the desert, he once again pleaded with God to let him enter the Land of Israel, and how God refused his request. In light of what we have just said, it would seem that this should form part of the historical material reviewed in the preceding parashah, which concludes with the events immediately preceding Moses' prayer. Why then, is it placed here, at the beginning of parashat Va'etchanan?

Moses knew that the generation standing before him was not on the same level of spiritual perception as that of the preceding generation, who had witnessed the miracles of the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah. He therefore understood that their confrontation with the materiality of the physical world would be a struggle, and that it would take time — perhaps a long time — until they would accomplish the purpose for which they were entering the land. He therefore wanted to accompany them into the land in order to boost their Divine consciousness, as much as possible, to his level. True, they had not seen what he and his generation had seen, but they might be inspired by the intensity of his communion with God. If he would cross the Jordan with them, it might give them the strength to conquer the land and take possession of it in the fullest, most spiritual sense.

As we will see, the spiritual perception of the generation of the desert compared to that of the generation of the conquest was like that of sight compared to hearing. When we see something, we do not need to be convinced of what we saw: we know it to be so; after all, we saw it. In contrast, when we hear something (or hear about something), we may be convinced of what we heard, but our conviction can be overturned by persuasion and argument. Seeing is a direct perception and therefore incontrovertible, whereas hearing is indirect and therefore subject to challenge. Thus, even if the Jews of the generation entering the Land of Israel would not doubt the truth of their Jewish beliefs for a moment, the façade of materiality would still have a louder voice in their minds than it ever could have had in their parents'. The reality of God and the subordination of the physical to the spiritual had simply not been burned into their souls with the same intensity.

Thus, Moses wanted to impart this spiritual sight to the new generation. “God, You took the initiative to show Your servant Your magnanimity…. Please let me cross over and see the good land…."

Had he been able to see the land from within with his eyes, it would have looked different to the entire Jewish people.

But God only let him see the land from afar. “Ascend to the peak of Mount Nebo and lift up your eyes westward, northward, southward, and eastward, and see it, but only from afar, with your eyes—for you will not cross this Jordan River.” Resigned to the fact that his people would not attain this level of Divine perception, he instructed them to at least “listen to the decrees and the laws that I am teaching you,” thus setting the tone for the rest of his address to them, and indeed, for the rest of the Book of Deuteronomy.

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But why did God refuse Moses' request to enter the land? Why did He not want the Jewish people to attain Moses' level of spiritual perception, which would enable them to accomplish their task in the land that much swifter and better?

The answer, of course, is that despite the advantages of sight over hearing, there is also an advantage of hearing over sight. True, when we see something, our sense of the reality of what we see is much stronger than when we only hear about it. However, this experience of certainty is solely due to the force of the experience and not to any work we have done in refining our perception. It is a certainty imposed upon us from without rather than one that solidifies gradually from within. Therefore, its effect on us as people, albeit powerful, is superficial and ephemeral. Once we are no longer looking at what we saw, our experience of it begins to fade, eventually becoming weak enough to be challenged.

In contrast, the conviction of truth we arrive at indirectly engages us to a much greater and more profound degree. In the course of reaching this conviction, we have to struggle with the arguments and perceptions posed by the world, which challenge and conflict with this truth. By answering and overcoming these tests, we
The **WEEK IN REVIEW** - Vaetchanan/Eikev

are changed in the process.

Since, as we know, the purpose of creation is that Divine consciousness permeate reality to the greatest extent possible, that our entire being be filled with the knowledge of God, it is clear that in order for this to be accomplished, it was imperative that Moses not accompany the Jewish people across the Jordan. When we will have refined reality to the greatest extent possible by dint of our own efforts, we too will be granted the spiritual perception of Moses, as it is written, “And the glory of God will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together.”

* Nonetheless, as we have learned, the prayer of a righteous person is always fulfilled in some way. So, Moses’ request that the Jewish people be given his level of spiritual vision was indeed granted on some level. Thus, each of us possesses an inner vision of reality that affords us absolute certainty with regard to issues of Jewish faith. Based on this inner sight, this unshakable inner conviction, we can withstand any of the worldly deceptions with which material reality challenges us; we can preserve our own Divine consciousness and disseminate it throughout the world, as well. This undertone of certainty enables us to enter our own promised land, our arena of life-challenges, and confidently stride forward toward the ultimate and final Redemption.

**EIKEV**

*Week of: Aug. 2-8*

As was explained in the previous *parashah*, although God did not fully grant Moses’ request that our Divine perception be characterized by the certainty associated with the sense of sight, He nevertheless did implant this level of Divine perception in our latent, subconscious minds. This subliminal perception endows us with the conviction necessary to fulfill our God-given mission: to promulgate and disseminate Divine consciousness throughout the world. At its initial, literal level, this mission focuses on the national duty to conquer the Land of Israel from the nations who personify the deification of worldly forces and antagonism to Divine awareness. On its derivative, allegorical level, this mission translates into our challenge to liberate all aspects of life from their materialistic orientation, allowing them to express their true, Divine essence.

The Divine “sight” implanted in our subliminal consciousness is, as Moses asked that it be, a Divine gift, unearned and unconditional. It is our job to actualize it, to bring it from subliminal to sentient consciousness. This is the subject of *parashat Eikev*.

*Parashat Eikev* begins, “If you will listen….” As was explained, listening (or hearing) is a lower level of perception than seeing. Indeed, the name of this *parashah*, Eikev, literally means “heel,” the lowest extremity of the body and perhaps its most insensitive part. On the other hand, hearing involves our interpretive efforts more than does seeing, since seeing is a more direct experience than hearing. True, it is possible to see without seeing attentively, i.e., without “looking,” just as it is possible to hear without hearing attentively, i.e., without “listening.” But on the whole, we are quicker to know what it is we have seen than what it is we have only heard or heard about, and we are more staunchly convinced of the truth of what we have seen than the truth of what we have merely heard. Attaining knowledge through hearing requires more effort.

The same holds true for Divine perception in the manner of “seeing” versus Divine perception in the manner of “hearing.” The advantage of attaining Divine awareness via “hearing” is that it requires us to reach deeper into our personalities, forcing us to forge a more profound relationship with God than that which is accomplished through “seeing.” “Seeing” Divinity the way Moses did is more direct, more immediate, and more overwhelming, but it is at the same time more ephemeral, more elusive. In contrast, “hearing” Divinity requires us to dig deeper, to examine and work through our entire system of belief, until we reach the very bedrock of our Divine soul, our Divine essence, which then serves as the basis of our commitment to our Divine mission in life.

This, perhaps, is why the verb “to listen,” both in Hebrew and in English, means not only “to hear with the ears” but also “to obey.” When we “hear” a truth consummately — in the very fiber of our being — we become committed to that truth.

Paradoxically, then, it is hearing, rather than the more riveting experience of seeing, that enables us to commit ourselves wholeheartedly and totally to our Divine calling. This is one reason why the word for “if” in the opening phrase of this *parashah* (“If you will listen…” literally means “heel”: the heel, as we noted, is the least sensitive limb of the body, and is thus a metaphor for raw commitment, the least emotionally engaging form of fulfilling our Divine mission.

Raw commitment and self-discipline, essential though they may be as the immutable basis of our relationship with God, are not intended, of course, to be either the entirety or quintessence of that relationship. We are bidden to progress from “hearing” to “seeing,” to manifest our subliminal surety of God’s existence that He granted us at Moses’ behest. Living life on this level of Divine awareness is a much loftier experience since, as we said, the experience of seeing overtakes our entire consciousness; all our faculties of intellect, emotion, and expression are imbued with this heightened energy.

The culmination of this process is alluded to in the following *parashah*, Re’eh, which opens with the words: “See, I have placed before you this day…” The implied promise is that if we fully and truly “hear,” as detailed in *parashat Eikev*, then even in
had not been pertinent for the generation about to enter the Land of Israel. Specifically covered are the new judicial system, further details regarding the prohibition of idolatry, laws of sacrifices, the establishment of the monarchy, the priests’ entitlements and divisions, divination vs. prophecy, cities of refuge, theft, testimony, perjury, war, and unwitnessed murder.

Thus we see that the authority of all four principal forms of Jewish leadership — judicial and legislative (the judge), executive (the king), ritual (the priest), and religious (the prophet) — are confirmed and formalized in this parashah.

Inasmuch as all four of these offices are discussed within the same parashah, whose name is Shoftim, “judges,” it follows that the Torah considers the judge to be the generic prototype of leadership. This is because the role of the judge, as envisioned in this parashah, is to ensure that the behavior of both the individual and the nation conform to the Torah’s ethical, moral, and ritual standards, thereby ensuring the welfare of both the individual and the community as they combine to form a well-functioning, safe, productive, and holy society. The maintenance of such a society is essential as the basis of revealing God’s presence on earth, making the world fit to be God’s home; as we recall, society’s degeneration into a lawless jungle and humanity’s banishment of God from life brought about the Flood.

In the context of the overall theme of the Book of Deuteronomy, teshuva — the call to return to God after a period of estrangement or lapse in commitment, as well as the tools to do so — parashat Shoftim highlights the necessity to empower and submit to authority, to subject our behavior to the review of those with whom we have entrusted the task of helping us live our lives in accordance with God’s plan and wishes.

This submission to authority is not, in the Torah’s scheme, a surrender to totalitarian oppression necessitated by the concession of human imperfection. On the contrary: since our essence, our Divine soul, intrinsically desires only to do God’s will in the fullest sense, fulfilling our unique Divine potential without hindrance, any deviation from that course is antithetical to our nature. Submission to an authority who determines if we are acting in consonance with the Torah’s directives is thus simply a way of facilitating being true to our innermost selves.

The conclusion of parashat Shoftim expresses this notion most eloquently. When the victim of an unwitnessed murder committed outside city limits is discovered, the Torah prescribes an elaborate ritual designed to remove any presumed, collective guilt for this crime from the community at large. Inasmuch as murder — depriving a person of the ability to fulfill his or her life’s mission—is the archetypal sin, and thus a metaphor for all sin, this ritual is in effect stating that we cannot ultimately be held responsible for sinning; it is because we are out of our native element in this material, God-denying world that we sometimes fall into behavior unworthy of our Divine origin. It is thus God’s doing, so to speak, that there is such a thing as sin, its purpose being that we reach a higher level of Divine consciousness by repenting and repairing the damage caused, through proper and sincere teshuva.

The first authority to whom we must submit our behavior for scrutiny is our own, inner judge, our intellect, whose task it is to govern our emotions and actions according to the Torah’s instructions. Inasmuch as the mind by nature rules over the heart, we can use the unfortunately largely untapped power of our mind to both steer our life in the direction we know it should go as well as to release our innate love and fear of God from their imprisonment at the hands of our ingrained materiality.

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the overall exilic context of “hearing,” we will be granted the ability to consciously experience the subconscious Divine sight (to “see” God’s “I”) that was implanted within us in parashat Va’etchanan. Nonetheless, it is the work we do while only “hearing” that enables our subsequent “seeing” to remain a permanent feature of our psyches, rather than the fleeting glimpse of higher reality that it is by itself.

Thus, in this parashah, Moses continues his review of Jewish history with the immediate aftermath of the Giving of the Torah (which he recounted in parashat Va’etchanan): the incident of the Golden Calf and the mechanism of return to God and reconciliation with Him — teshuvah. As we have noted, teshuvah is the underlying theme of the entire Book of Deuteronomy, but it receives particular emphasis in parashat Eikev, since it is the struggle to “hear” God, rather than the ecstasy of “seeing” Him, that characterizes the process of teshuvah.

The opening phrase of parashat Eikev is thus interpreted in the Midrash to refer allegorically to the messianic era. This is because “hearing,” aside from leading to “seeing,” also prepares us for the future messianic Redemption. As noted, “hearing” enables us to reach our own essence, and the result and reward of manifesting our Divine essence is the revelation of God’s essence that will occur after the final Redemption.

RE’EI

Week of: Aug.9-15

What first gives us pause about parashat Re’ei is its name, which means, “See.” As we saw in the preceding two parshiot, Moses asked God to let the Jewish people perceive Divinity as he did — with the same direct clarity associated with sight — but God refused his request. The generation of the conquest (and thus, all subsequent generations until the final Redemption) would only be able to perceive Divinity indirectly — in the manner of hearing. How is it, then, that Moses begins the next portion of his address to the people saying, “See”?

As we explained previously, the reason God did not grant Moses’ request, but instead kept the people at the level of hearing, was on account of the inherent advantages of hearing over sight. When a person has to establish and preserve Divine consciousness by struggling against the “din” of the material world, his perception becomes infinitely more profound than it could have been had it been solely based on a direct but external revelation. Inasmuch as the purpose of creation is to infuse Divinity into all strata of reality, it is clear that this goal can only be accomplished if our Divine consciousness assumes command over all of our mental and emotional faculties. This, of course, can only happen if we refine these faculties, re-orienting them away from the materialistic perspective they initially possess.

We further explained that Moses’ request was actually granted on a subtle, subliminal level. We all possess the unshakable conviction of “seeing” Divinity deep within our psyches; based on the extent of the imprint that this vision makes on our perception of reality, we can overcome the clamor of materialism that threatens to confuse us.

But in addition to this, the result of successfully “hearing” Divinity — of meditating and contemplating the reality of God deeply enough to affect and refine our cognitive and emotional faculties — is that the subliminal “sight” that God implanted within us on account of Moses’ prayer surfaces to our consciousness. Our clouded perception of truth is purified by our arduous efforts at clarification, such that our minds and hearts become transparent to our inner point of Divine enlightenment. We “see” Divinity with the same clarity of perception as did the generation of the desert, who experienced direct, Divine revelation. But our advantage is that this “sight” is superimposed on and anchored in the solid, inner conviction born of having methodically refined our conscious faculties on our own. Therefore, after instructing us to “hear,” Moses tells us to “see.”

Parashat Re’eh comprises a large variety of subject matter. In it, Moses begins his review of the legal matter of the Torah’s preceding three books, covering the laws of sacrifices, idolatry, kashrut, charity, the sabbatical year, slavery, and the festivals. Thus, the focus in this parashah shifts from the basic tenets of Judaism, as discussed in the first parashiot of Deuteronomy, to the specific duties of the Jew. This focus will remain throughout the next three parashiot, as well.

In this light, the brief introduction at the beginning of the parashah — headed by Moses’ sweeping declaration that yes, we can achieve sight-consciousness of Divinity after all — is the transitional nexus bridging the first three parashiot of Deuteronomy and the following four, setting the tone for the legal material that follows. We have been promised that we can ultimately receive the Divine gift of direct perception and relationship with God. We are then told to respond with renewed, ongoing efforts to refine and elevate the world, until it, too, becomes fit to behold Divinity directly, “and the glory of God will be revealed and all flesh will see it together.”

SHOFTIM

Week of: Aug. 16-22

Parashat Shoftim continues both Moses’ review of selected laws from the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers and his introduction of those laws that, until then,
KI TEITZEI

Week of: Aug. 23-29

In parashat Teitzei, Moses continues his review of the legal portions of the previous three books of the Torah, adding new material that will only become relevant once the Jewish people begin the conquest of the Land of Israel and settle it.

As we have noted previously, God commanded our ancestors to conquer the Land of Israel from its pagan inhabitants in order that the Jewish nation could have a land that it could make into a home for Him. Ultimately, of course, God’s intention is for the whole world to become His home; this is the essence of our sages’ statement that “in the messianic future, the Land of Israel will expand to encompass the entire world.” The first stage in this process was for the Jewish people to demonstrate to the nations of the world that this goal is achievable; this necessitated us having our own sovereign state in which we could pursue this goal unhindered. In this land, special laws would apply and unique commandments would be observed that would not apply or be observed anywhere else in the world.

Thus, the Land of Israel vis-à-vis the rest of the world would be the geographic equivalent of the Jewish people vis-à-vis the rest of humanity. God had set the Jewish people apart from the rest of humanity as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The priestly caste is required to observe special laws and fulfill special duties that set it apart from the rest of the Jewish people in order for it to serve as an idealization of the intense relationship with God to which every Jew should aspire in his or her daily life. Similarly, the Jewish people as a whole are to serve as an idealization and inspiration for humanity at large. Analogously, God set the Land of Israel apart from the rest of the world — by virtue of its special status in Jewish law and observance — in order that it serve as the example of what the rest of the world should aspire to become.

This, however, is only the first stage in the process of transforming the world into God’s home. The beginning of this parashah addresses the second stage in this process, assuming that the obligatory wars of conquest have already been fought and won and that the Holy Land has come entirely under Jewish jurisdiction. The next second phase in the process is for the Jewish people to undertake voluntarily to expand the borders of their state, thereby increasing the territory in which the special laws of the Land of Israel apply. In this way, they gradually increase the proportion of the world that exemplifies the ideal of being a true home for God.

Now, as we know, the rationalization for displacing the Canaanite nations is that they themselves were foreigners who had wrested the land from its original inhabitants, the offspring of Shem, from whom the Jewish people descended. By reoccupying the land, the Jewish people were merely restoring it to its rightful and intended owners, in that the Land of Israel was created to be the holy land lived in by the holy people. However, there can be no such rationalization for conquering land outside the borders of the Land of Israel. It is clear from the Book of Genesis that the various geographical divisions of the world were assigned to the nations suited to inhabit and develop them, each according to its unique cultural disposition. By what right, then, can the Jewish people appropriate territory apparently not intended for them?

Furthermore, waging war is dangerous, and the Torah forbids us to endanger ourselves unnecessarily. When the Torah specifically directs us to wage war, as when conquering the Promised Land or in self-defense, it is clear that this directive overrides the prohibition against endangering our lives. But an optional war is not such a case; how, then is it permitted to undertake such a war?

As it happens, these two questions are actually each other’s answers. The very fact that waging war against another nation is a dangerous affair indicates that nation has not recognized that its true fulfillment lies in its submission to the Divinely-inspired guidance of God’s representatives on earth, the Jewish people. It has therefore defined itself as an enemy of holiness. Let us recall that voluntary wars are to be initiated only after the obligatory wars (and their corresponding inner, spiritual wars) have all been fought and won — that is, after the Jewish people have successfully inherited the land and transformed it into a utopian model of holy living. If a neighboring nation, witnessing this model of what a Divine home on earth could be, chooses not to participate in this vision (by accepting the Torah’s rules of life for non-Jews), it has forfeited its right to steward its own land and citizenship.

The reason the Torah does not explicitly command us to conquer such a country, leaving the initiative to our discretion, is because only in this way can it be truly demonstrated that we fully identify with the Divine imperative. If we have internalized God’s perspective on life to the extent that we are willing to risk our lives to promulgate Divine consciousness even when not specifically commanded to do so, this readiness is itself our mandate to do so.

As we know, the spiritual analogue of conquering the Land of Israel is conquering the diverse forms of evil embodied by its earthly inhabitants. This struggle is obligatory and, if carried out successfully, it will effect the changes in our personalities necessary for us to achieve and sustain ongoing Divine consciousness. The means used to wage this war against evil is the commandments of the Torah, both the prohibitive and the active.

However, once this goal has been achieved, we have two avenues of further
The WEEK IN REVIEW - Ki Teitzei / Ki Tavo

The next three parashiot — Re'eh, Shoftim, and Teitzei — are for the most part devoted to the second section of Moses' farewell address: his exposition of certain portions of the Torah's legal corpus that were either already presented in the preceding books of the Torah or that became relevant only at this point, on the eve of the people's entry into the Promised Land, and whose presentation was therefore deferred until now. The present parashah — Tavo — marks both the conclusion of this second section of Moses' farewell address as well as the beginning of the third and final section, his review of the covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people. This review will continue through the ensuing four parashiot, to the end of the Book of Deuteronomy.

The first part of parashat Tavo, the conclusion of Moses' exposition of the Torah's legal corpus, focuses on one, single commandment: the obligation to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The question that naturally arises, then, is: Would it not have been more logical to place this lone commandment at the end of the preceding parashah, having it conclude the second, legal section of Moses' farewell address, and then begin this parashah with the final section? Clearly, there must be some reason the last commandment to be discussed in Moses' legal review is prefaced to his exposition of the covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people, as if it was chosen to set the tone for the entire exposition, and thus effectively for the rest of the book.

Bringing the first fruits to the Temple is not only a declaration but also an act: we actually bring something to God.

By so doing, we demonstrate that everything in the world—even that which we have produced by our own efforts and which we should therefore rightfully be entitled to call our own—actually belongs to its Creator. Whatever “belongs” to us is really only entrusted into our care in order to enable us to fulfill our mission on earth: to make the world into God's home.

Allegorically, the Jewish people are God's first fruits, since the rest of creation was brought into being merely in order to function as the setting in which the Jewish people could fulfill their Divine imperative. Inasmuch as the Jewish soul is pure Divine consciousness, it is the epitome of the “home for God” that creation was intended to be, the model for the rest of creation.

Just as the first fruits must be brought to the Temple, so is the Temple every Jew's natural home, by virtue of his natural, intrinsic God-consciousness; every Jew's natural environment is proximity to God.

This consciousness should ideally pervade all aspects of our lives. Even when we are not actively engaged in overtly “religious” pursuits, we should remember that we are “first fruits” and live every moment in intimacy with God.

Thus, the commandment to bring the first fruits is a tangible expression of our true relationship with God. In this sense, it expresses much more than our thanksgiving to God or the acknowledgement that He is the master of all creation; it demonstrates how we ourselves are essentially one with Him and belong together with Him at all times.

It is thus clear why the commandment to bring the first fruits is postured as an introduction to Moses' exposition of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. It articulates the true depth of this covenant and indeed sets the tone for all that is to follow.
The **WEEK IN REVIEW** - Ki Tavo / Nitzavim

Furthermore, the commandment to bring the first fruits teaches us that our bond with God, in essence, transcends even the Torah itself. True, under normal circumstances our relationship with God is defined by the Torah and operates through the Torah’s directives concerning how we live our lives. But there are times when our covenant with God “overrides” the Torah. For example, when a Jew violates part of the Torah, or, through no fault of his or her own, has not been properly exposed to the Torah and therefore has yet to accept it as their guide in life, he or she remains a Jew nonetheless, and his or her covenantal bond with God is as intact as that of any other Jew: such individuals are God’s first fruits and belong in the Temple. It is just that this inner essence has been hidden by circumstances.

The text that is recited when we bring the first fruits reflects this very concept. “An Aramean [Laban] tried to destroy my father [Jacob]; he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and became there a great, strong, and populous nation. The Egyptians mistreated and afflicted us, and made us work hard. But we cried out to God, God of our fathers, and God…took us out of Egypt…and brought us to this place [the Temple]….” What is articulated here is God’s love for His people before the Torah was given, before we entered into a contractual relationship with God. We invoke here God’s relationship to us that transcends the Torah.

This intrinsic relationship forms the basis of the covenant that we will study in detail in the course of the rest of the Book of Deuteronomy.

It is also therefore apt that this parashah is named Tavo, “you enter [the land].” Entering the land would seem to be nothing more than a prerequisite to living in the land and to fulfilling the commandments we can perform only in the land. But the essential lesson of this parashah is that everything about us belongs to God, that even seemingly ancillary and preparatory aspects of our lives are part of our relationship with Him and should be permeated with the same intensity of Divine consciousness and emotion that should permeate the more overtly “religious” aspects of our lives.

A further lesson: The fact that the name of this parashah — which is devoted to the covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people that pervades all aspects of life—is “you enter,” indicates that whatever we do, we should enter into it with our full heart and soul. Even if we are only preparing to serve God, we should put our all into this preparation, since at that moment, that is the essence of our service to God. As such, it both includes and sets the tone for the ongoing relationship with God that we will consummate presently.

And finally, the Torah does not state “if you enter” but “when you enter.” This teaches us that we should at all times be aware that we stand at the threshold of the Promised Land, that the true and final Redemption is only a breath away, and that if we only put ourselves fully into our present relationship with God, we are assured of the consummation of this relationship that will accompany the complete and final Redemption.

**NITZAVIM**

**Week of: Sept. 6 - 12**

As we said previously, in the third and final section of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses summarizes the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. After having discussed the consequences of honoring and violating the terms of this covenant in parashat Tavo, he focuses on its essential nature in the following two parashiot, Nitzavim and Vayeilech.

For the public reading of the Torah on the Sabbath, these two parashiot are, in most years, read together. In fact, according to some opinions, they are actually one parashah, which is only occasionally split into two. Their common theme, as we said, is the covenant: Parashat Nitzavim focuses on God’s side of this covenant, while parashat Vayeilech focuses on the Jewish people’s side.

This difference in focus is first of all reflected in the names of these two parashiot. Nitzavim means “standing” and Vayeilech means “and he walked.” The adjective “standing,” implying the maintenance of a firm and immutable posture, is most aptly applied to God, who by definition is absolute, unchanging perfection: “I am God, I have not changed.” The Jew, however, is intended to walk an infinite road of self-refinement, always changing. “Thus said the God of Hosts: ‘If you walk in My paths and keep My charge, you also will rule My House and guard My courts, and I will enable you to walk, in contrast to these [angels,] who [only] stand stationary.’

* *

A covenant is a bond of love that transcends rationality. Even though the rational reasons that foster love may be absent at some point, the parties to the covenant agree to continue loving each other nonetheless.

The way we evoke this super-rational attitude in how God relates to us is by first evoking it in ourselves, by cultivating our love for our fellow Jews. By loving each other — even when the rational reasons that would foster such mutual love may be absent — we are manifesting our super-rational relationship with our fellow Jews. We are thus taught that loving our fellow Jew is the highest expression of our love of God. “I have loved you, says God,” and, in the words of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, “if we truly love God, we love what He loves, the Jewish people.”

Nonetheless, the mere sentiment of love, however praiseworthy, is not enough; the sentiment must be translated into action. After all, we know God loves us no matter what and He knows we love Him likewise;
what the covenant is meant to ensure is that He always treats us lovingly in response to our manifesting our love toward Him. Moses therefore enjoins us not just to love each other but to “stand together,” in unity, treating each other lovingly and functioning together as a whole. This is the preparation and prerequisite for entering into the covenantal relationship of love with God.

Hence, when Moses begins to describe the new covenant the people are about to enter into with God, he points out that its effectiveness is contingent upon all Jews uniting together: “You are all standing today before God, your God—the leaders of your tribes, your elders, your sheriffs, every Israelite man, your young children, your womenfolk, your converts who have been accepted into your camp, your woodchoppers, and your water drawers—in order that you may enter into a covenant with God, your God…”

How can we truly unite? After all, the Torah itself implies that there are differences between Jews: some are “your leaders” while others are “your water drawers.” What could a prestigious leader and a rank-and-file Jew possibly have in common?

The answer to this is threefold: first, who is to say who is ultimately higher on the ladder of achievement? Appearances can be deceiving, and we tend to over-evaluate ourselves while under-evaluating others. Secondly, even if we have evaluated ourselves correctly, just because we are a leader in one particular aspect of life does not mean that there are not other aspects of life in which others are leaders. In truth, “everyone is completed by his fellow”; everyone is a leader in some way, and therefore, the perfection of the Jewish people is dependent on the inclusion of every Jew in the collective body.

Thirdly, the conceptual distance between any creature and the Creator is infinite. Thus, when we set out to evaluate ourselves in terms of our relationship with God, the profundity of our own worthlessness in the face of God’s absolute reality will neutralize any presumptions of superiority we may entertain vis-à-vis another person. We will be so overwhelmed by our own smallness that such a comparison will seem preposterous!

When we consider these three perspectives, we can truly stand together, united, not only with feelings of love toward each other but with behavior that testifies to the truth of those feelings.

There are several levels of unity: There is the loose bond that joins us when we unite for a common cause. We remain individuals with our own private agendas, but our common devotion to a specific goal enables us to unite and act as a unit. This is a pragmatic arrangement rather than true unity, the proof being that once the goal is achieved, the union disbands.

In contrast, a true bond that results when we, as members of a group, sense that every member of the group has a unique contribution to make to all the others. This sense of mutual cross-completion impresses on each of us that we need every other individual, and that we cannot achieve our own fulfillment without them all.

Nonetheless, in such a union, each individual remains aware of himself or herself as an individual. A yet higher unity results when each individual feels as though he is part of a collective body. In a well-functioning body, not only does each limb make a unique and indispensable contribution to the well-being of every other limb; the individual limbs have no real significance outside the context of the body.

These latter two forms of unity are both essential elements of true Jewish unity. Ideally, we should both emphasize our individuality and that of our fellow Jews — our unique contribution to the whole — and surrender our individuality to our identity with the collective whole of the Jewish people. Nonetheless, in daily life, our chief emphasis is on the first of the two types of unity, for being aware of our mutual interdependence despite our individuality is a true indication that Divine consciousness has permeated even our self-awareness, our lower states of consciousness.

Furthermore, these two types of unity are themselves interdependent. Only when we operate on a day-to-day basis on the premise that we are mutually interdependent can we hope to ultimately feel like one entity. And only if we realize that ultimately we are all one entity can we realize on a day-to-day basis that we need each other.

We can now understand why it was so crucial for Moses to reiterate and review the covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people as their final preparation for entering the Land of Israel.

As we said, the covenant with God is reflected in the interdependence of the Jewish people. As they were about to cross the Jordan, it was vital that they be forged into a nation — not remaining a mere confederation of individuals united for a common purpose, but becoming a new entity, a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The expression of this wholeness was the fact that every Jew became responsible for every other Jew’s observance of the Torah’s commandments, encouraging them to perform the commandments and preventing them from violating them. In the desert, the Jews could indulge in considering themselves individuals first and members of some vague notion of nation second. Now, as they stood poised to commence a life as a nation, this orientation had to change.

Moses therefore brought us now into the covenant with God a final time. In so doing, he imbued each one of us with the awareness that we can never be complete
without all our fellow Jews, and that ultimately, we are all parts of one collective body. With this awareness, we are ready to enter the Promised Land and together transform it and the whole world into God’s home.

**VAYEILECH**

Week of: Sept. 6-12

Parashat Vayeilech continues the record of Moses’ address to the Jewish people on the last day of his life. In this parashah, Moses instates Joshua as his successor, finishes committing the Torah to writing, relates to the people the commandment to assemble every seven years to renew their covenant with God, and prepares them for receiving “the poem of witness” that will constitute the next parashah, Ha’azinu.

As we pointed out in the overview to parashat Nitzavim, the two parashiot of Nitzavim and Vayeilech are in most years read together in the public reading of the Torah, this fact supporting the view that they actually one parashah, which is only occasionally split into two. Together they contain the essential features of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people: parashat Nitzavim focuses on God’s side of the covenant, while parashat Vayeilech focuses on the Jewish people’s side of the covenant. Furthermore, this difference in focus is reflected in the names of the parashiot, for the word Nitzavim means “standing firm,” referring to God’s immutable essence, whereas the word Vayeilech means “and he walked,” referring to our never-ending journey of spiritual refinement.

In particular, however, Nitzavim and Vayeilech allude to the two complementary aspects of our own spiritual lives. We all have to learn how to stand firm vis-à-vis those aspects of our spiritual life that require uncompromising resolution as well as how to constantly progress vis-à-vis those aspects of our spiritual lives that require continuous change, growth, and development.

This dichotomy is evident in the Torah itself: whereas the Written Torah is a fixed, unchanging text, the Oral Torah is an ever-expanding, dynamic corpus of explanation of the Written Torah and its application to the ever-changing specificities of each generation. Even the Oral Torah itself exhibits this dichotomy, inasmuch as its constantly broadening expanse of new insights can develop only within the Torah’s own fixed guidelines that govern the derivation of such insights. This is how we understand the sages’ statement that “any new insight that a veteran student will ever derive has already been given to Moses at Sinai.”

Similarly, the spiritual exercise of prayer exhibits both sides of this dichotomy. The obligation to pray a specific number of times every day, or in specific contexts, as well as the text of our prayers — the liturgy — is fixed. On the other hand, prayer is “the service of heart” and is therefore dynamic, inasmuch as the scope and intensity of our emotions are constantly changing and hopefully maturing.

Finally, religious practice — the performance of God’s commandments — also reflects this dichotomy. The number of commandments is fixed at 613, but it is always possible to improve our performance of them, both physically and spiritually, by performing them more meticulously and thoughtfully, respectively.

Thus, all three divisions of our relationship with God — the study of the Torah, prayer, and the performance of the commandments — evidence this complementary dichotomy is evident. The presence of this dichotomy in all aspects of our religious life keeps us mindful of the twin foundations of Judaism: its fixed, unchanging aspects are God speaking to us; its constantly changing and developing aspects are us responding to God.

*The dichotomy alluded to in the names of the twin parashiot of Nitzavim and Vayeilech — in addition to reflecting the two sides of Jewish observance — also expresses the opposite poles of attitude we must cultivate in order to be able to live vibrant, full spiritual lives.

On the one hand, we need to cultivate resoluteness in our commitment to fulfilling God’s will, never allowing ourselves to be swayed by social comment from without or misgivings from within. On the other hand, we must cultivate the flexibility and agility necessary to remain open to new and higher insights.

Thus, the sages teach us, “Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, fast as a deer, and strong as a lion, to do the will of your Father in heaven.” On the one hand, we are enjoined to be “bold as a leopard” and “strong as a lion” in our steadfast, unshakable commitment; on the other hand, we are enjoined to be “light as an eagle” and “fast as a deer” to fly and run quickly and nimbly from one level of Divine consciousness to the next, higher one. It is not by accident that this statement is quoted at the very beginning of the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, which governs the daily life of every Jew.

Normally, it is hard to imagine how we can manifest both attitudes simultaneously. And indeed, Nitzavim and Vayeilech are in some years read separately, in order to reflect the phenomenon that we are not always capable of living both sides of this coin at once. But as we mature in our ongoing process of self-refinement, increasingly binding ourselves to God, who transcends all dichotomies and paradoxes, we can learn how to live both sides of this paradox at once; this is reflected in the majority of years, in which Nitzavim and Vayeilech are read together.

Nowhere is the complementary nature of these two poles of religious life so apparent as it in our relationship with the world at large. When, as is required of us, we venture out of the spiritual safety of Torah study, prayer, and personal
performance of the commandments in order to refine the world and disseminate Divine consciousness, our ability to successfully “walk” (Vayeilech) in the possibly antagonistic world is directly dependent on how firmly we are rooted (Nitzavim) in the spiritual home from which we have ventured.

* * *

It is instructive that the Torah describes our side of our covenant with God by means of the idiom of walking. Although walking is a steady, measured form of progress (as opposed to running or jumping, for example), at the same time it distances us totally from our point of origin (as opposed to standing up or growing, for example). Thus, in employing the metaphor of walking, the Torah is teaching us that our relationship with God should be characterized by progress so radical that each new step lands us in a totally different place, that our infinite “return” to Him should continually make us into new people, individuals who have left their former selves far behind.

In the overall context of the Book of Deuteronomy, which, as we have seen, is the book of teshuvah — return to God, parashat Vayeilech thus instructs us how to make teshuvah into a truly transformative experience. This is perhaps why the account of the Torah’s completion is found specifically in parashat Vayeilech, even though we would have expected this account to appear chronologically at the very end of the last parashah of the Torah.

In order to progress to a new level of Divine consciousness, to a new level of understanding the Torah, we must first “finish the Torah” at our present level of consciousness. We are similarly taught that in the afterlife, in order for the soul to progress from one level of Divine consciousness to the next, it must first purge itself of the Divine consciousness it has achieved thus far, and similarly when it progresses from its newfound Divine consciousness to its next awaiting level.

This process is ongoing, and will continue until — and even after — we reach the ultimate goal of teshuvah, the restoration of the world as God’s ultimate home, with the advent of the messianic era and the final Redemption.
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In a 24/7 world, why do we tend to focus on what's urgent instead of what's truly important? Imagine: 24 hours of digital silence. No phones. No computers. No TV. Just valuable time with the people you love, to do all the things you've needed to do but never quite found the time for. We invite you to explore the mystical, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of Shabbat as we unlock a model for achieving balance and serenity in the modern age. Over six weeks, we'll uncover timeless principles for how to achieve a life of inner peace while making each workday more productive and fulfilling. Sign up today for a remarkable experience.

**You Be the Judge II**

Do you enjoy puzzles and problem-solving? Do you love the give-and-take of thoughtful discussion? Can you use logic and creativity to work your way out of challenging situations? Then this course is for you. The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute’s groundbreaking course, “You Be The Judge”, presents real cases brought before the Beit Din, the Rabbinic court system. We provided the primary texts from the Talmud and ask our students to grapple with the facts in order to arrive at satisfying solutions. You need no prior knowledge of the Talmud and no formal legal training. There are no prerequisites other than an open mind. If you missed You Be The Judge I, we invite you to experience for yourself the exhilarating mental exploration that characterizes traditional Talmud study. And if you took our previous course, be sure not to miss this exciting sequel!

**The Kabbalah of Time**

Examine time and the Jewish calendar through the mystical lens of Kabbalah. Time is a profound, organizing element of our existence, and the cycle of the Jewish calendar provides a powerful template for personal growth. Discover both a practical understanding of the structure of the Jewish calendar as well as mystical insights into recurrent patterns of time.

These courses are designed to help you learn more about your Jewish identity.

If you are unable to pay for the postage to mail in your question sheets, please let us know and we will do our best to help you (envelopes are provided). The courses are free. You may enroll in one course at one time.

To receive any of these courses, email sarah@aleph-institute.org.

*Thank you for your participation, and enjoy your studies!*
Tefillin for Military Personnel

Tefillin is one of the most important Mitzvot (precepts) of the Torah. It has been observed and treasured for thousands of years, right down to the present day. The Torah commands every Jewish male to: "Bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they should be for a reminder between your eyes." (Deuteronomy 6:8)

Tefillin consists of two small leather boxes attached to leather straps. The two boxes each contain four sections of the Torah inscribed on parchment. One of the boxes (the "hand Tefillin") is placed upon the left arm so as to rest against the heart - the seat of the emotions, and the suspended leather strap is wound around the left hand, and around the middle finger of that hand. The other box (the "Head Tefillin") is placed upon the head, above the forehead, so as to rest upon the cerebrum. In this manner our attention is directed to the head, heart and hand. It teaches us to dedicate ourselves to the service of G-d in all that we think, feel and do. It is also to teach us not to be governed solely by the impulse of the heart, lest that lead us into error and transgression. Nor are we to be governed by reason alone, for that may lead to harsh materialism.

The Significance of Tefillin

Tefillin has been denoted by Sages of the Talmud as one of the most important commandments in the Torah. At first glance, it seems like such a simple act: just wrapping leather straps and boxes around one’s head and arm. But in fact, this belies what is so beautiful and unique about Tefillin: The fact that one can connect with G-d in a very physical way, every day. As human beings, we have limited intellectual and emotional capacities; yet, our physical action is not diminished by the limits of our cognitive and emotional abilities. Tefillin represents transcendence beyond our meager selves, toward the Divine. The Tefillin stand out in their austere simplicity. Two spartan boxes, which Torah law mandates to be unadorned and painted black. For the tefillin convey not pride, but the Jew’s subjugation of his mind, heart and deeds to the Almighty. Yes, Tefillin are the prestige of the Jew, but the Jew’s prestige does not lend itself to aesthetic depiction. His prestige lies in his servitude to G-d, in the binding of his intellect, emotions and talents to the supernal will.

Our Sages tell us that donning Tefillin brings special blessings of safety and protection. The Lubavitcher Rebbe therefore encouraged every Jewish member of the Armed Forces to wear Tefillin daily in every circumstance, and thereby merit to come home safely. The Aleph Institute would like to urge every Jewish male reading this to make the commitment to start putting Tefillin on daily, or at least weekly. We would be happy to assist you to acquire your very own pair of Tefillin.

*This offer for free Tefillin is only available for Jewish Service Members who cannot afford to pay on their own or through family members. Fulfillment of this offer is exclusively at Aleph’s discretion.

Jewish Military Personnel interested in obtaining a pair Tefillin should e-mail Rabbi Katz at military@aleph-institute.org
Aleph Offerings

God of Our Understanding is a frank and penetrating look at the underlying spiritual dynamics of addiction and its treatment through Twelve-Step programs. Rabbi Shais Taub, a world renown expert in Jewish mysticism as well as a mentor to many thousands of Jewish addicts, draws from his unique background to thoroughly address many of the concerns raised by Jewish addicts in recovery while also using Jewish knowledge to enrich the understanding of the spiritual principles of recovery for addicts of all faiths.

To request this book, write to: “G-d of Our Understanding” c/o Aleph or email receptionist@aleph-institute.org

Military personnel can request this book by emailing military@aleph-institute.org

Sidur (libro de oración) disponible en español a través de Aleph:

Si usted es Judío y no lee bien en inglés y le gustaría recibir un siddur en español, por favor escriba a:
"Siddur Español
Envíe un e-mail a: receptionist@aleph-institute.org
Siddur (Prayer Book)

Got Tzitzit?

Wearing tzitzit is a sign of Jewish pride. Jews have always had a way of dress to distinguish them from the people of the lands in which they lived—even when that meant exposing themselves to danger and bigotry. By the grace of G-d, today most of us live in lands where we are free to practice our religion without such fears. Today we wear our Jewish uniform with pride and with our heads held high!

Jewish Service Members willing to undertake this special daily mitzvah can order a free pair of Tzitzit or a Tallit by sending an email to military@aleph-institute.org.
Family Services
Connecting Families to Communities

Give the Gift of Summer Camp!

Aleph sponsored over 100 children for an incredible Jewish camp experience. This summer, 2020, you can help arrange for your child/ren to have an unforgettable amazing camp experience. It could be a week at a local day camp, or an entire month at an overnight camp; the Aleph Institute can make it happen! If you want your child to experience the summer of a lifetime, do not let funds get in the way! Children ages 3-18, Jewish day camps, sleep-away camps, and even teen traveling adventure camps!

As of this printing, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we do not yet know if extended gatherings and summer camps will be possible, but please do not let this stop you from reaching out to Aleph Family Services to get your children registered and G-d willing they will have an amazing summer camp experience. Please call 347-762-5374 or email feels@aleph-institute.org - scholarships are available, don't let your family miss out!

FREE High Holiday Seats for Your Family

Aleph is glad to help find a synagogue close to your family's home, and arrange for seats FREE-OF-CHARGE. Share this information with your family and help them celebrate the high holidays in a warm, welcoming Jewish community.

Jewish Education & Hebrew School

While your children are at home out of school, we can set them up with an Online Hebrew School that introduces them to other children their age, and connects them to Jewish learning, Jewish spirit, and unity. There will be many opportunities for the next school year to enrich your child’s life with stellar programming and exciting programs. Please contact us or have your family contact us.
Keep us informed with where you’ll be so we can keep you supplied with whatever you need for the High Holidays!

Email us to keep us updated with your location:

warrior@aleph-institute.org