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Re'eh 5781

The Month of the Door

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered August 13, 1966)

The aliyat reggel, the pilgrimages prescribed by our Sidra for the three major festivals, were no pleasure trip for the pilgrims of ancient Judea. Their journey had to be undertaken in days when there were unavailable not only the first class hotels, but barely inns of any kind. The pilgrim had to sleep on the ground instead of his accustomed bed; scrounge for food; be deprived of all comfort and conveniences; whereas had he remained at home he could have lived his normal comfortable life. Nowhere in the Talmud do we find that any special arrangements were made to accommodate these pilgrims who came to perform this sublime commandment.

Yet, interestingly, in next week's portion we find the description of another kind of traveler in the Holy Land. We are told that if a man murdered by accident, unwittingly, that we were to prepare for him a number of cities designated as "cities of refuge," to which the murderer could flee and thereby escape the vengeance of the relatives of his victim. The Torah tells us *takhin lekha ha-derekh*, you shall prepare the way of the murderer. And the Mishnah explains that *mekhavnot la-hem derakhim mi-zu le'zu*, the highway would be especially prepared throughout the country so that the man who murdered unwittingly would have no difficulty in making his way to the city of refuge. Throughout the country, at every crossroads, there were signs exclaiming "*miklat, miklat*," i.e., "this way to the city of refuge."

Thus, while the pilgrim had no signposts prepared for him to facilitate his journey to Jerusalem, the murderer had every consideration prepared for him in order to make his way to the city of refuge as quickly and easily as possible. What discrimination! Here the pilgrim must wander from place to place, inquire at the door of every village or hamlet: "which way to Jerusalem?," while the man who was a murderer would find his way with the greatest

of ease. We must remember that whereas many of these accidental murders were complete accidents, nevertheless, one may assume that usually such people who committed them were not always the most pleasant and honorable. The Rabbis, discussing these unwitting murderers, maintain that *be'derekh she'adam rotzeh leilekh molikhin oto*, usually, a man is led to where he wants to go in the first place!! The unwitting murderer has revealed in his "accidental act" what lay at the bottom of his unconscious.

Why this consideration for the murderer, and the apparent neglect of the pilgrim?

Permit me to commend to your attention an answer provided by one of the scholars of the Musar movement. This discrimination was purposely legislated by the Rabbis, he maintains, for the purpose of *hinukh*, education. The Rabbis wanted to make sure that Jewish children in homes throughout the country would have every possible opportunity to meet with people who were decent and virtuous, and to minimize the opportunity to encounter people who had committed vicious crimes. Therefore they did not facilitate the way for the pilgrim, hoping that this *oleh reggel* would knock at every door along the way so that children should be able to meet people who are pilgrims, the people who are inspired to go to Jerusalem and sacrifice every comfort for it. Whereas, they wanted to make sure in the meantime that no Jewish child will meet with a *rotzeiah*, with a murderer. They therefore made sure that signs across the country would provide all the answers to the murderers' questions, so that children would not be acquainted with that type of individual, and not have him for a sort of model whom a child might want to emulate.

Now this idea does not completely accord with contemporary principles and practice. We have somehow come to believe that in order for a child to receive a well-rounded education, it is necessary for us to acquaint him

with every sordid practice of contemporary society lest he grow up naive and unknowing. We feel that a child must be acquainted with crime and degeneracy, and we import such models of behavior into our living rooms through television and radio, and we bring our children to the scene of such negative ethical conduct in the movies and theatre.

According to this interpretation of our Sidra, the reverse should be the case. We should not deny our children the knowledge of the presence of evil, but we ought to avoid any direct confrontation with it in their impressionable years.

Modern parents, unfortunately, do not always understand this. Many of us, motivated by genuine liberal instincts, oppose any censorship laws by government. This may be right or wrong, depending upon one's political and social outlook. But certainly no parent should conclude that because government ought not to be given the power of censorship, that a parent too ought never exercise censorship. If we want our children to grow up as decent citizens and good Jews we must carefully control their diet not only in food, but also in reading and entertainment. We must ease the way for that represented by rotzeiah to bypass our homes, whereas we must open our homes to that which is represented by oleh reggel.

This holds true not only for the home, the school, the camp and leisure time for children, but for ourselves as well. The Jewish heart and mind must be exposed to that which is valuable and creative and constructive, not the reverse. Wise human beings, from the Greek philosophers to the Sages of Hasidism, have maintained that a man is where his thoughts are, and that a man becomes what he thinks. If our thoughts lie with the rotzeiah, that will become the standard for our development; conversely, if our thoughts tend towards the oleh reggel, then that represents the kind of persons we shall become.

We welcome, this week, the new month of Ellul. During this month, when we recite the seilhot prayers, we shall repeat, fairly constantly, one of them which proclaims:

It's Your Choice

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

Parshas Re'eh begins with a general statement by Moshe to the people that they are confronted with the choice between blessing and curse, depending on whether or not they observe God's commandments.

lo be'hessed ve'lo be'maasim banu lefanekha, we have come before Thee, O Lord, not with any special claim on your love, or with any special record of good deeds; ke'dalim ve'rashim dafaknu delotekha-- we knock on your door like people who are poor and destitute. The great teacher of Kabbalah, R. Isaac Luria, has taught that dal ve'rash, the "poor" and the "destitute," are the symbols of the two months of Tammuz and Av, in which we fast and commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. If so, says the Hasidic author of "Benei Yisas'khar," then following this same prayer, the month of Ellul must be symbolized by dellet, the door. Thus, we come from the experience of "poor and destitute" (i.e., Tammuz and Av) to "knock on Thy door" (Ellul). This last month of the year, the month preceding Rosh Hashanah, is symbolized by--the door!

Indeed so! The door represents the entrance to our homes and our hearts; it is that which we may shut or open, depending upon whom we find at our doorsteps. Ellul reminds us that we must use that door: to shut it in the face of the rotzeiah, and to open it wide to welcome the oleh reggel.

Indeed, so does God Himself do. The first day of Ellul is the time that Moses ascended Mt. Sinai for the second time to receive the luhot, the Ten Commandments. Moses tarried there for forty days, and came down with the final and acceptable tablets on Yom Kippur. During this time, Moses prayed to God for forgiveness. And God closed the doors of Heaven on the sin of the golden calf, and opened them up to the petition of Moses and the teshuvah, the repentance, of the people of Israel.

On these days of Ellul, therefore, we remind ourselves about the doors of our homes and our very existence. And we turn to God and we pray to Him; petah shaarei shamayim le'tefillatenu, open the doors of heaven--to our prayers.

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He then tells them that when they enter the land, they will perform a ceremony in which the blessing will be declared from Mt. Gerzim, and the curse will be declared from Mt. Eival. Why was there a need to mention this

to the people now, since the ceremony would not be performed until after they entered the land? Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor, a 12th century Talmudic authority, writes, in his commentary to this parsha, that this declaration served as an introduction to the second part of Moshe's farewell address to the nation. Until now, Moshe had been reviewing the nation's past, pointing out the mistakes that the previous generation had made, and advising the new generation not to repeat those mistakes. Now, Moshe was preparing to mention specific commandments that they had to observe. First, however, he had to tell them that they had the ability to keep these commands, and, so, he explained the principle of free choice to them.

It is interesting to note that parshas Re'eh is read every year either on the Shabbos preceding the beginning of the month of Ellul or the Shabbos following it. This month is one of introspection leading up to the days of repentance beginning with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur. Rabbi Nachman Cohen, in his work *A Time for All Things*, points out that the mitzvos in this week's parsha have special relevance to the month of Ellul and the theme of repentance. We may add that, in light of Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor's comments, Moshe's opening declaration to the people also has relevance to this time of year. The Rambam, in his *Laws of Repentance*, chapter five, delivers a lengthy discourse on the principle of free choice. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, z"l, in his classical work, *On Repentance*, delineates two types of repentance. One type of repentance, he says, is rooted in external forces, or even in an emotional crisis within man, but does not emerge from the person's core belief system. The other type of repentance, however,

emerges from an intellectual, existential crisis within the person, and prompts a reassessment of his life, in general. This second type of repentance, says Rav Soloveitchik, is rooted in man's freedom of choice, and this is why the Rambam explicates this principle in his *Laws of Repentance*. Thus, Moshe's declaration to the people that they have freedom of choice and therefore have the ability to keep all of God's commandments has special relevance to the month of Ellul, just as the rest of the parsha does, as demonstrated by Rabbi Cohen.

Ramban, in his introduction to the book of *Devarim*, writes that the mitzvos that are mentioned in this book are specifically related to the life of the nation in Eretz Yisroel. Although the format of *Netvort* does not permit us to discuss how each of the mitzvos in parshas Re'eh

fits into this pattern, I believe it can be demonstrated that most of them readily do. However, there is one mitzvah in particular that would, at first blush, seem to be unrelated to the land. That mitzvah is the mitzvah of tzedokoh, of providing poor people with their needs. This is, obviously, a mitzvah that is incumbent upon the body of a person, and would seem to apply wherever a person happens to be, as long as there is someone else around who needs to be helped. However, the Torah specifically connects this mitzvah to the presence of the nation in Eretz Yisroel, as we read: "If there will be a destitute person among you, of one of your brothers in any of your cities which the Lord, your God, gives you, you shall not harden your heart nor shall you close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, opening, you shall open your hand to him, you shall grant him enough for his lack which is lacking for him" (*Devarim* 15:7-8). Why is this mitzvah stated in connection with the land? Doesn't it have application everywhere in the world?

Rabbeinu Bachya, in his commentary to this verse, writes that tzedokoh does have special relevance to Eretz Yisroel, just as all mitzvos do. To prove this, he cites the *Sifrei*, which teaches us that all the mitzvos were meant to be kept in Eretz Yisroel, and we are commanded to observe them outside the land, as well, so that, when we return, they will not seem new to us. Regardless of how we understand the deeper meaning of this *Sifrei*, however, we still need to explain why it is specifically in regard to the mitzvah of tzedokoh that the connection of mitzvos to Eretz Yisroel is highlighted in the Torah. Moreover, from this week's haftarah reading, it seems that it is through the mitzvah of tzedokoh that the nation will return to the land after being exiled from it, as we read, "Establish yourself through tzedokoh" (*Yeshayah* 54:14). More explicitly, the haftarah to the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av, known as Shabbos Chazon, ends with the statement, "Tzion shall be redeemed with justice, and her returnees through tzedokoh" (*Yeshaya* 1:27)." Apparently, the exile occurred because people did not perform the mitzvah of tzedokoh. What, then, is the connection between tzedokoh and the existence of the nation in Eretz Yisroel?

The Talmud, at the end of tractate *Sotah*, tells us that after the destruction of the Temple, there were no longer any people of faith to be found. Rashi there explains that the Talmud is referring to people who have trust in God and rely on him to do good, without worrying that they will lack anything. Rav Avrohom Pam, in his *Atarah*

LeMelech (pages 152-154) cites this explanation of Rashi, and demonstrates that a person who truly trusts in God and believes that all he has comes through God for a purpose, will not refrain from providing poor people with their needs. Rabbi Matisyohu Solomon, in his *Matnas Yad* (pages 239 ff.), also develops this theme, based on different sources. Moshe, in the first part of his farewell address to the nation, as presented in the first three parshas of the book of *Devorim*, continually tells the people that their success in the land will depend on their fealty to God and His mitzvos, and warns them not to become arrogant and believe that the bounty they enjoy in the land is a result of their own efforts, and not a result of God's special providence in the land. The mitzvah of *tzedokoh*, as explained by Rav Pam, is a primary test of this kind of faith, and perhaps it is for this reason that the Torah

connects it specifically to the Holy Land. Following our earlier remarks, we can add that this mitzvah has special relevance for the month of Ellul, as well. In order to realize the level of *teshuvoh* that touches the core of our existence, as explained by Rabbi Soloveitchik, we need to strengthen our faith and trust in God. Perhaps this is why *tzedokoh* is recommended as a primary way of doing *teshuvoh* at this time of year. Rav Soloveitchik actually refers to the type of *teshuvoh* rooted in one's free will as redemptive repentance, and perhaps this is why, on a wider scale, it is through *tzedokoh* that *Tzion* will be redeemed and the exile will end. May we all, individually and collectively, return to God in a complete way, be inscribed for a wonderful new year, and experience the final redemption of the Jewish nation.

Banim Atem La-Hashem Elokeichem

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Adapted by a Talmid)

In this week's Parsha, the pasuk says *Banim atem la-Hashem Elokeichem; lo sisgodedu ve-lo sasimu korcha bein eineychem lameis*. We are children of Hashem and, seemingly therefore, we should not cut ourselves or tear out our hair when a close relative passes away, *lo aleinu*. The question that all the meforshim deal with is: What's the connection between us being the children of Hashem, and the issur of *lo sisgodedu ve-lo sasimu korcha bein eineychem lameis*? Rashi says that since we are the children of Hashem, we should look nice, and if we have cuts on our skin and our hair is torn out, we will not look nice. Children of Hashem need to have a presentable appearance.

But most meforshim assume that the connection is a little more philosophical than that. And it deals, specifically, with the mitzva of *lo sasimu korcha bein eineychem lameis*—in the context of, *lo aleynu*, death of a loved one and consequent *aveilus*. The *Da'as Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei Tosafos* and other *Ba'alei Tosafos* say that one should not be so sad when a relative dies. Because, after all, this relative might be dead, but you have a closer relative who is always alive—that is Hashem! Hashem is your father, and He is closer to you than any other relative. He is still there for you. However, most meforshim find this unsatisfying as well. Even though we still have Hashem, why should we not be sad when our relative passes away?

And therefore, Ibn Ezra and others suggest that this mitzva gives us an insight how Hashem runs the world. Says Ibn Ezra: *Banim atem la-Hashem Elokeichem*—Hashem is your father. Your father takes care of you. Everything that a father does for his kid is for the best—even though the kid does not always understand that (especially during their younger years)—even when tragic things happen, even when things happen that the Torah commands us to react with sadness and *aveilus*. Still, that doesn't mean it's bad for us. Hashem runs the world, and everything that happens is good. And therefore, while of course we are sad, and we practice *minhagei aveilus*, if *lo aleynu*, our relative passes away. Nevertheless, there is a limit. We don't cut ourselves. We don't tear out our hair. We don't mutilate ourselves or harm ourselves. Because we know that even though we are sad, everything is for the best, on some level. And I think the point of this Ibn Ezra is not just a philosophical "Everything is for the best." Someone could philosophically believe that Hashem is infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, and infinitely good—and He runs the world. And therefore, everything is for the good of the world. Yes, it's for the good of the world, but it's not necessarily for the good of me. Perhaps my good is being sacrificed for the good of the world. Therefore, says this pasuk, *Banim atem la-Hashem Elokeichem*. A father, a parent who takes care of his kids, doesn't just sacrifice his kids for the good of

blessings can be given collectively to many people, but each individual will perceive it in his own way, depending on his own particular personality and outlook. Blessings can be universal, but the perception of them is always individual. Therefore, when Hashem tells us to 'see' He uses the singular form, but the placement of the blessing is expressed in the plural" (Rabbi Frand on the Parashah, p.262-263).

Perhaps it is human nature to focus more on what we lack than what we have. However, if we but stop and contemplate the grandeur of the world around us, the great gift of life itself, the workings of the human mind and body, and the privilege of being part of Am Yisrael, perhaps then we would truly 'see' all the blessings spread out before us.

Miriam Peretz is a well-known Israeli woman, mother and spokesperson and the face of many Israeli families who have lost sons in battle R"l. Miriam lost two sons in the IDF; her son Uriel (age 22 years) fell in 1998 in battle with Hezbollah in the north, and her son Eliraz (age 31 years) fell in 2010 in battle with Hamas in the Gaza Strip - HY"D. Between the loss of her first and second son, her husband Eliezer a'h died at the age of 56 years old, which Miriam attributes to a broken heart. And yet... incredibly, this woman of valor lives a life of: *רָאָה אֶנְכִי נִתֵּן לְפִנְיָךְ הַיּוֹם בְּרַכָּה* - recognizing and counting her blessings, and noting the constant presence of G-d in her life.

Miriam powerfully relates, "In the past few years, I have held a constant dialogue with G-d. I discover His mercy in every step of my life, in every angle and situation. On Rosh Hashana eve, I was slicing meat and I almost cut off my finger. At the last second, the knife fell from my hand. I lifted my eyes from the sink, looked through the window to the skies, and said to G-d: 'Thanks for thinking of me.

Children of Hashem

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Every human is G-d's creature. Parshat Re'eh outlines an additional status for Jews - we aren't just Hashem's creatures, we are also His children. This status had been alluded to during the early stages of the Exodus from Egypt. Hashem initially demanded that Pharo release His imprisoned child- the Jewish people. Pharo was cautioned that if he didn't accede, his own first born would be taken. This implicit message is now articulated explicitly- we are Hashem's children.

Every human is gifted with Divine traits: intelligence,

Thanks for having mercy on me, for permitting me to stand in synagogue this Rosh Hashana without a bandage on my hand. I could have been seriously hurt, but at this crucial moment, You were here with me. Thanks for your kindness to me.

"There's nothing worse than losing two sons. Yet I, who experienced the worst that could possibly happen, am busy all day long finding G-d's kindnesses.

"One day I decided to do an exercise. I took a piece of paper and drew two columns. At the top of the first, I wrote 'List of my complaints to G-d,' and for the second, 'List of G-d's kindnesses.' The first list was short: Uriel, Eliezer and Eliraz were taken from me before their time. The second list was practically endless: my daughter Bat-El got married, little Gili danced and sang at their wedding, Uriel's friend came to visit, my daughter-in-law Shlomit invited me to spend Shabbat at their home, despite a slipped disc in my back I can still go up the stairs and climb up to my children's graves, I can open my eyes, stand on my feet, enjoy the blossoming of the trees, laugh with my rambunctious grandchildren - and the list goes on and on.

"My dance with G-d has become a daily event. I feel a deep connection to Him. I get up from bed after a sleepless night, I see the sun in the window and say, 'Thanks for what I have right now.' Not for the good that might come tomorrow or the next day, but for now. I say, 'Thanks, G-d, for not forgetting me, for never being too busy for me. You're always available to listen to my pain'" (Miriam's Song, p.375-376).

May we always be blessed with many blessings, and may we have the courage, humility, foresight and hakaras ha'tov (recognition of the good), to realize and appreciate all the brachos that G-d showers upon us. .

emotion, consciousness, creativity, free will, hopes and personality. Crafted in the image of Hashem, every human must be respected and protected. More so, we believe that humans are created righteous and upright. Humanism- the belief in human virtue and human potential- is a cornerstone of Jewish faith. However, in addition to Divine image, Jews are chosen for a historical mission- to call humanity to a higher ground. We alone accepted the Divine invitation and His mission and because of our acquiescence, we alone, are cherished. To demonstrate His

love, G-d adopted us as His children.

Balancing our respect for all humanity with our unique and chosen status as children of Hashem can be delicate. Some Jews are so universalist that they have all but abdicated any sense of “chosenness”. To them, the notion that a Jew possesses a unique status or is more beloved as a child, feels racist and bigoted. Sadly, many other Jews are so national in their outlook and parochial in their experience that their view of non-Jews borders upon xenophobia or outright racism. Our greatest visionary, Rabbi Akiva, “threaded the needle” between these two complementary truths: “Every human is beloved (chaviv) to G-d because they possess a Divine image. A Jew is more treasured (chavivin) because he is a child”. Selection as children should not diminish our respect or care for Mankind. If anything, our mission and the basis for our status as children, demands greater sensitivity for

general human welfare. Alternatively, our shared experience with other human beings cannot blur our pride in being selected.

How does this preferred status as children affect our religious identity and practice? Firstly, it should bolster our faith in the face of tragedy. This designation as “children to G-d” is embedded in a section of Parshat Re’eh which cautions against overreaction to death or excessive grieving by disfiguring our bodies. When facing devastating and perplexing tragedies we may not possess all the answers, but we should maintain confidence that our lives aren’t random nor is our fate cast to chance or whim. Poise and confidence lies at the core of faith. Reminding ourselves that we are children should provide confidence that we are cared for- even if we can’t fully decipher the outcome.

Being a child of G-d doesn’t only steady faith, it also demands that we behave with dignity and “class”. As Hashem’s children we represent Him and His majesty.

The Elusive Blessing of ‘Peace’

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s Torah portion, parashat Re’eh, contains some of the most exalted verses in the entire Torah concerning G-d’s promises for peace and tranquility for the Jewish people.

In the opening words of the parasha, G-d clearly informs the Jewish people that His people have a choice--of blessing or of curse. The Torah provides a simple formula for the Jewish people to receive the blessing. All we must

In addition to obeying Him, we must also honor Him through lives of nobility and grace. Any mutilation of the human body, even when self-inflicted or even in response to grief, is vulgar and incompatible with our profile as children of Hashem. Interestingly, after prohibiting body mutilation, the Torah restates the laws of kosher food. Beyond the specific details of kashrut, there is great benefit to the general limiting of the range of foods we consume. Limiting the types of foods which can be eaten lends dignity and restraint to the experience of eating which, if left unregulated, can become animalistic and degrading. Presumably, with more limited food options, Jews are less prone to gluttony, drunkenness and many other forms of vulgar behavior which can stem from overindulgence in eating. If the Torah is meant to help us even slightly dislodge from the sway of the flesh, laws governing our eating habits are central to that goal.

Most of all, being a child of Hashem doesn’t carry an expiry date. Many of our relationships in life fluctuate, transition and sometimes cease. Once a child, however, always a child. The gemara in Kiddushin (36) cites Rabbi Yehuda who claimed that our betrayals forfeited our status as His children. Regrettably, this formed the basis of the Christian assault against the Jews: we were once the chosen people but our repeated rebellions and the ensuing exiles indicated that Hashem had discarded us and chose another.

Responding to Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Meir lists four additional verses in Tanach, each portraying us as children of Hashem, even when we stray or betray Him. Once a child always a child. Thousands of years have passed and we were always Hashem’s child even when it wasn’t historically apparent. The curtains of history have now been pulled back and it is obvious that our Father is beckoning us home. Once a child always a child.

do, according to the Torah, Deuteronomy 11:27, אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹת הַשָּׁם אֲלֵי-לְקִיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם, is to hearken to the commands of the L-rd, which I command you this day. Sounds rather easy!

The Torah then declares that G-d will bring the people into the Holy Land that He promised to give them as an inheritance. However, they must, as a first step, cleanse the land of every vestige of idolatry and rid the land of

the decadent practices of the Canaanites. After purifying the land, G-d adjures the people of Israel to sanctify the land, to worship with joy, and to appreciate the prosperity and tranquility that will be theirs. How uplifting are the concluding words of Deuteronomy 12:18: וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ לְפָנַי הַשֵּׁם בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־לְקוּיָךְ, בכל משלח ידך your G-d, in your every undertaking.

Further amplifying the Al-mighty's love for His people are the verses of Deuteronomy 14:1-2. The Torah poignantly declares: בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, You are the children of G-d...for you are a Holy people to the L-rd your G-d, and G-d has chosen you for Himself to be an עַם סְגֻלָּה, a treasured people, from among all the peoples on the face of the earth. With such extraordinary blessings, what could go wrong?!

The Jewish people are indeed an “awesome” people. Awesome in their accomplishments, and awesome in their challenges. As we read every year in the Passover Haggadah, שֶׁבְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתָנוּ, In every generation they [the enemies of the Jewish people] rise up to destroy us. Were it not for the Holy One Blessed Be He, the Jews would have long ago ceased to exist as a people on the face of the earth.

And yet, to the consternation of many who wish us ill, we Jews consistently break the historical mold. Logically, the Jewish people should long ago have ended in the ash-heap of history together with the other great nations and civilizations: the ancient Chinese and Egyptians, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Goths, the Angles, the Saxons, etc. The fact that we continue to exist against all odds, led the renowned British historian, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), to derisively describe us as, “fossils of history.” We Jews defy the conventional patterns of history, and continue to survive, nay, even flourish! We rise phoenix-like from the ashes of Auschwitz to establish new communities, a new state, and flourishing Torah centers that equal or surpass even the most glorious periods of our people's history.

Yet, somehow we never seem to learn the ultimate lesson of history. Unfortunately, the Jewish people appear to have a self-destructive disposition--a propensity to attempt to defy the Divine odds. G-d warns the Jewish people, again and again, Deuteronomy 12:13 and 15:9: הִשָּׁמֶר לָךְ --Take heed!! The formula for success and blessing is to follow G-d's instructions. Failure to do so will result in destruction. No matter how successful we appear today, G-d will bring us low.

For the person of faith, Jewish history must be viewed

from a perspective that is far different from the secular perspective. “Peace” for the Jewish people is not a factor of diplomacy or politics, although we certainly must engage in such. Peace for our people is a factor of the Jewish people's spiritual relationship with G-d. Over 3000 years of historical empirical evidence serves as testimony that there has never been a period of peace for the Jewish people without a concomitant return to G-d. Over 2,000 years ago, the prophet Jeremiah 2:18, pleaded with the ancient Israelites: מָה לָּךְ לְדָרֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, לְשָׁתוֹת מִי שַׁחֲוֹר? Why do you run to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? וּמָה לָּךְ לְדָרֶךְ אַשּׁוּרָה, לְשָׁתוֹת מִי נָהָר? Why do you run to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? None of these alliances will be of any benefit to you! Peace for our people is a factor of our relationship with G-d!!

I have often wondered why in 1978, the Camp David peace accords between Israel and Egypt were concluded between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin? Why was this peace not established earlier during the leadership of Golda Meir or Levi Eshkol? They were certainly more conciliatory, more likely peace partners than the old hardline Revisionist, former “terrorist” Menachem Begin, whose motto was, “שְׁתֵּי גְדוֹת לְיִרְדֵן – זוֹ שְׁלֵנוּ, זוֹ גַם כֵּן,” both sides of the Jordan are ours; both are part of the Jewish homeland!

I believe that the Camp David peace agreement with Egypt is directly attributable to the fact that Menachem Begin was then, the first Israeli Prime Minister in 30 years to utter the words: בְּעֶזְרַת הַשֵּׁם --“B'ezrat Hashem,” With the help of G-d we will achieve peace. Never before had a Jewish Prime Minister pronounced that magical phrase! Begin opened the door just a little, and G-d responded with peace!

This is our challenge. In these fateful days, following the period in which we marked the destruction of both our Temples in Jerusalem and the expulsion of our people from the land, in these special days that usher in the coming month of Elul and the High Holy Day period, let us be certain to merit G-d's blessings for peace and tranquility.

Let us pray, that the actions and efforts of the leaders of the State of Israel will give us reason to celebrate, and not mourn. Let us hope that, in the coming months and year, the elusive blessing, the blessing of peace, “Shalom,” for the people of Israel, will be ours. And that the coming days and years will usher in the ultimate peace, the Messianic peace, במהרה בְּיָמֵינוּ, speedily in our days. Amen.