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COMPACT
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COMPACT

Enriching the Lives of Conservative Jews

Jews enlightening Jews.
Jews mentoring other Jews.
Jews spiritually enhancing their own lives.

COMPACT's mission is to aid in Jewish self-growth, which affirms the *brit mitzvah* -- covenant -- of the Torah's commandments within each Jew.

TEVET 5769

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From The New York Times



OR LA YEHUDIM TEVET 5769

(A Light to Our Fellow Jews in the Month of Tevet)

P.C. = POSITIVE CHUTZPA

Parshat Shmot begins with the entrance of the original *Bnai Yisrael* into *mitzrayim*, but quickly goes on to tell us that the generations are in a state of flux. Joseph, the Jewish Egyptian, dies and his brothers too pass from the players' stage into history. In Egypt, there is also change as *melech chadash asher lo yada et Josef* takes the throne, "a new king who did not know of Joseph."

New characters and a new set of circumstances result in new relationships. The patronage enjoyed by the Israelites passes and power corrupts the new leadership. The threat presented by the presence of the Israelites, real or imagined, is defined merely by their increase in size. The Israelites are to be feared simply because they exist. They may not have said anything. They may not have overtly acted in a particular manner. They may not have ever suggested, even unconsciously, a negative predisposition to their situation, but the new administration undertakes a policy of anti-Israelitism.

Hava nitchakma lo, pen yirbeh. The philosophy of the new Egyptian leadership was to deal shrewdly with the Israelite inhabitants: oppression, forced labor, ruthlessly embittering life -- and then, physical annihilation! Destroy the male children at birth and you effectively eliminate the entire people inside of a generation or two. Who is left to marry for an Israelite woman? Only Egyptian men! The marriage of people with different faiths, different cultures, different outlooks and without any sensitivity to the existence of the minority will result in the disappearance of the smaller, weaker, visiting group within a hostile environment.

A bleak picture is painted in the first chapter of *Shmot*, Exodus. We seem to be reading that if you live in the Diaspora, you are at the mercy of those in power. If you live outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, you are not master of your destiny. If you live in a hostile environment, expect to be psychologically and physically attacked. It appears that if you live outside of your ancestral homeland your survival as a clan, culture, faith and family is tenuous each day. External Anti-Semitism. Internal assimilation. Excessive acculturation. Inter-marriage. Dissolution forever.

Today's *parsha* outlines a pattern which will repeat itself in Jewish history more than a few times. Hellenists, Romans, Spaniards, Poles, Russians, Germans, and Arabs have each taken a turn at shrewdly manipulating the environment, the political situation, the economics and the social milieu in order to have a finger pointed at a scapegoat. A hand extended as a fist of anger at the people called the Jews is a commonplace occurrence.

Jews are threatened with historical revisionists and anti-Semites as well as by Jews whose action or inaction seriously threatens the physical and spiritual existence of our ancient religion's current generation.

Over and over again the words *hava nitchakma lo pen yirbeh*, let us deal shrewdly with them lest they grow



in strength, resounds. Nations and their leaders have repeatedly maneuvered to put the Jew individually and our people collectively on a collision course headed towards annihilation. Enough! *Maspik, dayenu, gamarnu.*

If there is a lesson for the galut mentality which Jews in and out of Israel must express, it is summarized in these Hebrew words: *maspik, dayenu, gamarnu*, which Israel has employed in its posture with the world.

Enough attempts to drown us. *Maspik*, stop telling me to be like you; *dayenu*, we have suffered more than any people deserves; *gamarnu*, we are finished with being stepped on, trodden upon and vilified. *Lo amoot ki echyeh.* I shall not die, I shall live.

It is time for those of us who choose to be Diaspora Jews to learn a lesson. It is time for the World Jewish Community to invoke the Biblical tone of *hava hitchakma lo*. It is time for us to use our *chachma*. It is time for Diaspora Jewry to “wake up” and employ shrewd thinking in the questions of survival – both physical and spiritual survival.

We need P.C. We need to build a new effective P.C. machine. We need a home P.C. and a business P.C. We need to teach ourselves how to use P.C. as a powerful tool for survival. We need public P.C. P.C. is positive *chutzpa*. Not Alan Dershowitz *chutzpa* which is fine for him and at times necessary. Not *chutzpa* which reinforces negative stereotypes. Positive *chutzpa* -- careful, calculated, shrewd wisdom, *Yiddish kup, saychel, chachma.*

Does survival matter to world Jewry? Do Israeli Masorti Jews have the positive *chutzpa* to bring *mitzvot* to the not yet observant? Does European Jewry have a future or should rabbinic leadership make a call for complete *aliya*? Can Jewry of the former Soviet Union revitalize itself and learn what had been lost for decades? Can American Jewry respond to the challenge from within? The answer is positive *chutzpa*.

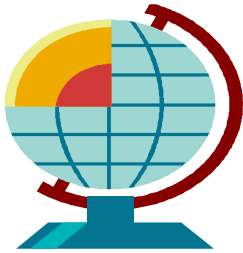
We need to analyze. We need to study the situation. We need to put our organizational heads together. But, ultimately, P.C. is the answer. “Just do it” was the Nike sneaker answer and it is the Jewish secret to survival – just do it. Take the hand of your friend and bring each other to Shabbat, to Sukkot, to Shavuot. Hold your child’s hand in love and bring her to Havdala, to Hanukah, to Hamantaschen. Walk with your teenager on the sacred soil of centuries of history for a *bar/bat mitzvah* observance. Walk with college students on campuses which are building Jewish communities.

We need positive *chutzpa* and we need to use the Torah’s verse *hava nitchakma lo*, “Let us deal shrewdly” as a source of reinvigoration to assure a vibrant Conservative/Masorti Judaism and a prophetic voice for humanity. P.C. awaits us. (*Parshat Shemot* will be read on Saturday, January 17, 2009)

Rabbi Moshe Edelman
COMPACT Editor



ACT AS A JEW TO IMPROVE THE WORLD



A LIGHT AMONG THE NATIONS

How many Jews does it take to change a light bulb?

If you could conserve energy, help stop global warming, and make the Earth a safer and healthier place in one simple step, wouldn't you?

WHO

The Jewish community has an intrinsic responsibility to respond to the environmental problems confronting us and future generations. Jewish tradition, values, and teachings speak of our moral obligation to protect creation. We need to address the global climate change crisis which may well be the issue of the century.

WATT

A nationwide campaign to engage the entire Jewish community in awareness, advocacy and action to conserve energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote energy legislation. The centerpiece of the program is to take action by changing to energy efficient, cost effective compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs.

We don't want the change to stop there. The other elements of the campaign, "Greening Synagogues," "Take Your Senator to Synagogue," and the "Climate Challenge," will bring about change in our congregations, our public policy, and in how our youth participate in energy action. Learn more at: www.coejl.org/climatechange.

WHERE

In our homes, synagogues, and Jewish institutions, we need to make lifestyle choices to conserve energy: switch to CFLs, adjust thermostats and hot water heaters, use ENERGY STAR efficient appliances, choose public transportation or purchase high mileage vehicles, and choose cleaner, renewable energy sources. As a people, we need to become more "energy observant."



WHEN

Today! "If not now, when?" There is no longer time to debate the issue. Part of the campaign will be to install CFL bulbs as a community.

WHY

Global climate change has put the world at risk, particularly the most vulnerable in our society – indigenous peoples, low-income communities, the elderly, and children.

As air pollution worsens, as storms intensify, as sea levels rise, as drought destroys crops, as glaciers melt, we are witnessing increased incidents of respiratory illness, migrating diseases, and an exodus of environmental refugees fleeing their homes.

ABOUT CFL

Change is hard, but changing a light bulb is easy. CFLs use up to 75% less energy than regular incandescent light bulbs, while lasting seven to ten times longer. This means less production of greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and toxic waste. The average CFL will save its owner at least \$25 in energy costs over the lifetime of the bulb! Your CFL will pay for itself in energy savings within two to three months (based on a 5-hour/day use and average electricity costs). If every U.S. household replaced one bulb with a CFL, it would have the same impact as removing one million cars from the road.

To make a donation to the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) go to:

www.coejl.org/donate

or send a check to: COEJL
116 E. 27th Street
New York, NY 10016

"It is not your duty to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it."

Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot

ABOUT COEJL

Founded in 1993, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) which operates within the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the leading Jewish environmental organization in the U.S. COEJL helps tens of thousands of Jews make a connection between Judaism and the environment. COEJL serves as the Jewish member of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, helping to lead national interreligious coalitions. COEJL deepens the Jewish community's commitment to the stewardship of creation and mobilizes the resources of Jewish life and learning to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants.



LIVE THE JEWISH CALENDAR



COMMON AND ORDINARY

Two words to describe the year 5769. Every year in the Hebrew calendar is either a common year (with 12 months) or a leap year (with 13 months). The current year is a common year. Leap years occur seven times in each nineteen year cycle. Specifically a year is a leap year if the remainder when dividing the year number by 19 is one of the following: 0, 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, or 17. (Note that 5769 yields a remainder of 12 upon division by 19, making it a common year.) Thus leap years occur either two or three years apart.

That explains the common part. Now for the ordinary.

Most months in the Hebrew calendar are fixed at either 29 or 30 days, and have the same number of days from year to year. However two of the months, Heshvan and Kislev vary from year to year, giving three different possibilities:

- 29 day Heshvan, 29 day Kislev: Deficient year.
- 29 day Heshvan, 30 day Kislev: Ordinary year.
- 30 day Heshvan, 30 day Kislev: Abundant year.

Combining this with the leap year discussion (above), there are six possible year types yielding six different year lengths:

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------|--------------------------------|
| a) Common Deficient | 353 days | 10% of years are of this type. |
| b) Common Ordinary | 354 days | 24% |
| c) Common Abundant | 355 days | 29% |
| d) Leap Deficient | 383 days | 15% |
| e) Leap Ordinary | 384 days | 5% |
| f) Leap Abundant | 385 days | 16% |

Although this year is common and ordinary, a few interesting calendar related items do occur:

- 1) Last year (5768/2008) contained no double Torah readings. This year contains the maximum of seven double Torah readings. A year with no double readings is always followed by a common ordinary year beginning on a Tuesday which has seven. The other occasion in which there are seven is a common abundant year which begins on a Monday. The next year with no doubles



will be 5812/2052. The next year with seven doubles will be 5780/2020

- 2) According to tradition, the sun is in the same position as it was at the time of Creation, every twenty-eight years on the day of the Vernal equinox. The date of the equinox (incorrectly based on a 365.25 day solar year) is (incorrectly) assumed to be the second Wednesday in April during the current century. Although it is incorrect due to accumulating errors, it is the date that is used. This year, 5769, is the year in the twenty-eight year cycle for which this applies. So, on Wednesday April 8, 2009 a special blessing known as *Kiddush HaHamah* is said. This ritual is probably the one with the least frequency--once every 28 years. Previous occurrences during most of our lifetimes were on Wednesday April 8 in 1953, and in 1981. The next occurrence will be on Wednesday April 8, 2037.

So even though this is a common, ordinary (ho, hum) year, Torah readers will have to work a little harder than usual (and much harder than last year) to deal with all of the double readings. Best wishes for an uncommon extraordinary year of peace and good health to all.

COMPACT thanks Larry Padwa for sharing his LUAH knowledge with all of us. larsip@optonline.net



NOT EATING AND BEING A JEW



TENTH OF TEVET: A DAY OF FASTING

Date of the fast in 5769: January 6, 2009

Coming as it does a week after the last day of Hanukah, the fast on the 10th of the month of *Tevet* (*Asarah B'Tevet*) might easily be overlooked. It occupies, however, an important niche in the story of Israel and the history of our people.

The text in II Kings (25:1-4) tells us that on the 10th day of the 10th month, in the ninth year of his reign, (588 BCE), Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, began the siege of Jerusalem. Three years later, on the 17th of *Tammuz*, he broke through the city walls. The siege ended with the destruction of the Temple three weeks later, on the 9th of *Av*, the end of the first Kingdom and the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon. It can thus be considered part of the cycle of fasts connected with these events: *Tzom Gedaliah* (3rd of *Tishrei*); *Shivah Asar B'Tammuz* (17th of *Tammuz*) and *Tisha B'Av* (9th of *Av*).

The first mention of this fast appears in Zechariah (8:19) where it is called the "fast of the tenth month..." (counting from the month of *Nisan*, which was the first month in Biblical times). Other references to the fast and the affliction can be found in Ezekiel 24:1-2 (the siege); Jeremiah 52:4-6.

However, although the fast is historically tied in with events surrounding the destruction of the First Temple, the purpose of the fast is not the commemoration of an historical event, but the state of affliction of the Jewish people.

- As with all Jewish fasts, the prayers for *Asarah B'Tevet* include *Selichot*, marking the day as an occasion for each of us to devote time to *Teshuvah* (repentance), the introspection that motivates us to reexamine our actions and change our ways. As the *Talmud* in *Brachot* says, "One who is afflicted should examine his or her actions and do *Teshuvah*."
- *Asarah B'Tevet* is the day of mourning for people whose last resting place or date of death is unknown (the *Kaddish Clali*).
- *Asarah B'Tevet* is one of four public fasts which begin at dawn (*alot hashachar* – about an hour before sunrise), but do not carry additional restrictions, such as washing oneself or wearing leather shoes, etc. (while *Yom Kippur* and *Tisha B'Av* begin from dusk the night before). However, it is the only fast which is not brought forward or postponed if it falls on a Friday, a mark of its immense significance.



LEARNING AS A JEW



LAWS OF MOURNING

The Talmud in Tractate Berachot 17a states: "When Rabbi Yochanan finished the Book of Job, he used to say: 'The end of man is to die, and the end of beast is to be slaughtered, and all are doomed to die. Happy is he who has been brought up in the Torah, and whose labor was in the Torah, and who has given pleasure to his Creator, and who grew up with a good name.' "

Rabbi Milton Steinberg, in his book "Basic Judaism," p. 160, states: "Death cannot be and is not the end of life. Man transcends death in many naturalistic fashions. He may be immortal biologically through his children, in thought through survival of his memory, in influence by virtue of the continuance of his personality as a force among those who come after him, and ideally through his identification with the timeless things of the spirit. When Judaism speaks of immortality, it has all these in mind, but its primary meaning is that a person contains, independent of the flesh and surviving it, his consciousness and moral capacity, her essential personality – a soul."

Life is sacred.

Its beginning and end are mysteries.

Both birth and death touch the fringe of the Divine and, therefore, have religious rites attached to them.

"The soul is yours, and the body works for you." Hence our concern when the mortal body reaches its end.

- 1) On hearing of the death of a person, one should say: "*Baruch dayan emet*," affirming an awareness that God's governing of the universe includes death as well as life. Death does not negate Divine providence, but it is rather an illustration of God's Being. Judaism has surrounded death with practices that include tender regard for the dying, deep concern for the family, and an affirmation of basic religious principles.
- 2) The principle of *kavod ha-mayt* is important in modern day situations such as autopsy, embalming, cremation, exhumation, transplantation of parts of the human body, and viewing the body prior to the funeral.
- 3) The period between death and burial is called *aninut*, and the person who is mourning is called an



onen. The *onen* is exempt from all religious obligations such as *tefillot* and putting on *tefillin*, and is forbidden to indulge in luxuries like wine and meat.

Why? *Haosek b'mitzva patur min hamitzva*. Since the bereaved is involved in the commandment of taking care of the needs of the deceased, nothing should distract him, and it is a breach of *kavod ha-mayt* not to attend to the deceased.

Since today societies and funeral homes care for the needs of the deceased, such exemptions are not necessary, and the performance of religious precepts is to be encouraged.

- 4) Reverence of the body is shown by the purification of the body which is usually done by members of the *Hevra Kadisha*. The washing is done accompanied by the recitation of psalms, and warm water is used. All parts of the body are washed. This process is called *tahara*.
- 5) A person whose body has been mutilated should not be washed, but should be buried without *tahara* and in the blood-stained clothes he wears.
- 6) Dressing up the deceased in fine clothes is frowned upon, and plain shrouds, *tachrichin*, should be encouraged. According to the Talmud, this custom was established so that the poor not be embarrassed and so that no display of wealth be shown.
- 7) Burial in the ground is in conformity with the verse in Genesis 3:19: *Ki affar ata, v'al affar tashuv*. The prevailing custom is to employ an *aron* – coffin. Just as with the shrouds, the coffin is to be simple boards.
- 8) Tradition frowns upon viewing the body or leaving the coffin open. (*Compare the Jewish tradition with other funeral practices, especially those of public officials.*)
- 9) The general rule is that the burial should be done as soon as possible and not be delayed. Waiting for family – sons, daughters – is permitted and should be done, especially since the delay is minimal with rapid means of travel and communication.
- 10) In conformity with the ancient tradition, see Samuel II 1:10: "One should rip his garment on hearing of the death of a dear one." Today this is limited to those relatives who are required to mourn.
- 11) Distinction is made between father and mother on one side and other relatives on the other. The rip in the garment for parents is on the left side, closest to the heart (*Why??*), while for others it is on the right side. (*What difference does the rip make to the community?*) This



rip is called *kriyah*.

- 12) Today a custom is to cut into a necktie or a sweater, or a shirt pocket, or the neck area of a blouse. Often a ribbon is attached to the garment. (*Do you think we should keep this approach or return to the former idea of ripping the garment itself? Why?*)
- 13) The funeral service does not have a prescribed format.
- 14) A *hesped*, eulogy, is usually given, but the Talmud warns: "Just as the dead shall be called to account, so shall the eulogizers be called to account," to prevent over praise as well as understatement for the deceased.
- 15) After the coffin is placed in the grave, members of the family should put shovelfuls of earth over the coffin. (*What is the reason for the family's participation in this facet of mourning? Think psychologically...*)
- 16) On returning to one's house, hands should be washed before entering.
- 17) Suicides are not to be mourned for in the traditional manner. (*What questions does this bring up for the family's needs and desires? What is the definition of a suicide? What should we do today? YOU be the rabbi.*)

The Mourning Itself

Step by Step

Shiva-Shloshim – Shana First Year – Yom Hazikaron (Yahrzeit)

- 18) In Pirke Avot, the rabbis say that a bereaved cannot be reached because of the shock at the time of death. Only later, after the funeral and after a realization begins to set in, can the mourner be consoled, spoken to, and slowly brought back to the previous pattern of life. Pirke Avot 4:18.
- 19) A week-long period is dictated for consolation of the mourner – *shiva*.
- 20) *Shiva* is obligatory on father and mother, daughter and son, sister and brother, husband and wife.
- 21) *Shiva* begins immediately after burial for seven days. The Talmud in Moed Katan presents the principle that part of a day is not like a full day – *miktzat hayom k'kulob*. Therefore, the last day is not a full day. Usually only a short period after Shacharit is required.



- 22) Covering of all mirrors in the house has been a custom. (*Why? Could you suggest – or guess – superstitious reasons for this? Should the custom be continued?*)
- 23) A *ner*, candle, is lit and remains alit for the full *shiva*. The candle flame is a symbol of the soul. As a flame is attached to the wick, so is the soul attached to the body.
- 24) As a part of the return to normalcy, a meal is to be prepared for mourners. The *Seudat Havra'a*, meal of consolation, is for people who often have guilt feelings that they are still alive and the relative is dead. The feeling of loneliness must be countered by friendship and concern for the people around. Eggs, symbolic of the continual circle of life and death never-ending, are served as the basis of the meal.
- 25) The mourners should sit on low stools or seats or pillows as a sign, not only of their physical but especially of their emotional state.
- 26) The mourners should remain in the house during the entire seven days. Services and meals should all be in the house in which they sit. (*What if there is not enough room in the house for all the people to sleep over?*)
- 27) On Shabbat, the mourner goes to the synagogue, but cannot receive an *aliya* or act as the *shaliach tzibbur* (prayer leader) except if it is his/her profession.
- 28) There is no mourning on the Shabbat, except what is done in private, in one's heart and mind. Shabbat counts as one of the seven days.
- 29) Mourners should make every effort not attend to their business or go to work for the entire seven days.
- 30) If the financial loss is irreparable, then after the third day it is permitted. Mourning should be observed as much as possible. (*What conditions would bring a mourner to work?*)
- 31) A doctor who is a mourner may visit patients if the confidence of the patient is to be maintained, although it is preferred that other doctors cover the responsibilities for the mourner.
- 32) Participation in festivities, weddings, listening to music is not permitted for mourners.
- 33) The mourner should wear non-leather shoes during the week. Leather shoes are both a symbol of wealth and come from a living animal which was killed to make the shoes.



- 34) Anointing (use of cosmetics, perfumes, lotions) is forbidden as a luxury and conscious concern for one's own body.
- 35) Haircuts and beard shaving should not occur during the week. They serve as a public display of mourning.
- 36) Sexual intimacy, one of the physical pleasures, is to be avoided during the *shiva*.
- 37) The normal and natural greeting – *Shalom*, Hello, how are you? – is not to be used because the condition of the mourner does not warrant such a question when the answer is obviously not good.
- 38) Visiting the mourners is a *mitzvah*, consoling the mourners – *nechum avaylim*.
- 39) Upon completion of the *shiva*, the mourner is told to go out and walk around. This is the first coming- back into the world, the sun shining back into one's life.
- 40) For the next 23 days, the mourner, while returning to work, observes some restrictions as a mourner in *shiva*. Festive occasions are avoided: weddings, dances, movies, theater. (*Would a news or information show on TV be permitted to the mourner to view?*) (*What about a serious concert, opera? What if you play a musical instrument for a living?*)
- 41) Shaving is to wait until the completion of the 30 days unless business responsibilities dictate a clean-shaven appearance.
- 42) Mourners may not marry within the 30 days.
- 43) A mourner for wife and husband must wait a period of the passing of the three pilgrimage festivals – Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot – before marrying. (Exception is made when little children are involved who require a mother's love and a father's fellowship. *What does this exception have to say for Jewish Law's rigidity, changeability, sensitivity?*)
- 44) Mourning continues by children for their parents for a "full year." The Kaddish is recited for 11 months. (*Why is Kaddish recited for a month less than the mourning period?*)
- 45) The Mishna teaches that the Shabbat counts as part of the *shiva* and does not cut off the observance of the *shiva*. The festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot) cut off the mourning period and are not counted among the days of mourning. (Talmud Moed Katan 19a.)



- No observance of mourning on Shabbat – after Shabbat, mourning is resumed.
- If the mourning has begun before Yom Tov, the festival cuts off the remainder of the *shiva*, as if it had been accomplished.
- *Shiva* can never be observed without a Shabbat, while it can be with no festival interference. There can never be a full *shiva* if Shabbat cut off the mourning completely so only the festival is counted as being able to fully cut off the *shiva* observance.
- The term *v'samachta b'hagecha*, "and you shall rejoice in your holiday", is used for festivals, and it is suggested that that is impossible if one must observe mourning. Whereas for Shabbat we are told to fulfill *oneg*, and you shall delight in the Shabbat, which can be done when private mourning is permitted.

46) The days of Yom Tov do count as part of the *shloshim* – 30 days. For example: If one begins *shiva* one day before Pesach, then at the onset of Pesach he would stop *shiva* (counts as seven even though), not observe mourning on Pesach (counts as eight more) and only have 15 days after Pesach.

47) The festival also cuts off the rest of the *shloshim*. For example: If one began *shiva* before Rosh Hashanah, then Rosh Hashanah cuts off the *shiva* and Yom Kippur cuts off the *shloshim*.

48) If the death occurs *during* the intermediate days -- Hol Hamoed – then the entire *shiva* and the *shloshim* are pushed off until after the entire holiday, and then a full 30 days are observed. The same applies if the death was on the Yom Tov itself, on the principle that no mourning occurs on the holiday and therefore nothing has been cut off, so all is observed. (*A toughy for the rabbis to explain and the mourners to observe.*)

49) If one is a far distance from the death and hears of the death *after* the *shloshim*, one is required to observe only one hour of mourning. If *before* the 30 days are completed, then a full *shiva* must be observed.

50) Each year on the anniversary of the death of the parent or relative, a solemn day of prayer, meditation and the recitation of the Kaddish at the Maariv, Shaharit and Mincha services take place. It is called *Yahrzeit* and a candle is once again lit.

May we each live full and productive lives. May we appreciate and observe the laws and traditions of Jewish mourning. May we find strength, comfort and consolation in the wisdom of Judaism.

Prepared and summarized by Rabbi Moshe Edelman



PERPETUATING JEWISH LIFE



LEADERSHIP STYLES: MOSHE AND/OR AHARON

The defining qualities of Jewish leadership was a subject that fascinated Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. It is, to him, the obvious theme of *Parshah Behaalotecha* and of *Parshat Korach*, but emerges also as a dynamic dialectic with broad contemporary implications from a brief comment by Rashi in *Parshat Va'eira* (to be read on January 24, 2009).

The *Parshat* opens with God's promise to rescue the Jews from "the burdens of Egypt." They are told that a glorious future awaits them after their liberation from slavery, culminating in their arrival "to the land that I raised my hand to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and I shall give it to you as a heritage – I am God."

However, much to Moshe's dismay, when he presents this message to the Jews, "they did not listen to him". He is then ordered to speak to Pharaoh, but balks at the command, saying "behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me?" Nevertheless, Moshe and Aharon are "commanded regarding the children of Israel and Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the children of Israel out of Egypt."

At this crucial point in the narrative, the Torah digresses and presents the names of the leaders of the tribes of Israel, concluding with the names, "*Aharon uMoshe*", to which Rashi notes: "There are places [in the Torah] where Aharon precedes Moshe and there are places in the Torah where Moshe precedes Aharon, to tell us that they are equal in value." This comment is borne out in the very next verse, where the Torah reverses the order of their names.

Rav Soloveitchik understands Rashi's words to reflect more than simple lessons about textual sequence and the equality of Moshe and Aharon. To the Rav, this comment offers a basic insight into the requirements for Jewish leadership at crucial junctures in Jewish history.

Moshe and Aharon, in the view of our Sages, represent sharply contrasting qualities. The Talmud states "Moshe's guiding principle was that the strict law is immutable, but Aharon loved and pursued peace and sought to reconcile man with his neighbor." The Midrash further elaborates: "Kindness and peace, this is Aharon; truth and righteousness, this is Moshe."



These two approaches, the Rav points out, present the classic choice that Jewish leadership must make between *din*, law, and *rachamim*, compassion. Should it exercise the firm uncompromising “truth” of Moshe, or the softer, more flexible “kindness” of Aharon?

This, then, is the great dilemma of *Parshat Va'eira*. At this crucial and transitional moment in our nation's early history, following the oppression in *Parshat Shemot* and still awaiting the redemption that begins in *Parshat Bo*, the need for leadership is enormous. During this interim period, between “darkness and light”, doubt and confusion are rampant and the centrality of leadership is heightened.

But which kind of leadership – that of Moshe or that of Aharon? The stern, unwavering approach of *emet* or the loving embrace of *hesed*?

The answer is, unequivocally, both. Throughout our history, from *Parshat Va'eira* until contemporary times, when Jews are suffering, the quality of Aharon must be emphasized. They need to be cared for and loved unconditionally in the classic mold of the *Hasidic* rebbe.

But at the very same time, when liberation is imminent and freedom is around the corner, the principles of *Torat Moshe* must be affirmed.

We may very well be living in a *Va'eira* moment – neither fully oppressed nor fully redeemed – and we therefore need the duality of *emet* and *hesed* to be delicately applied. To reach the minds and hearts of our people, Jewish leaders must combine the legacies of Moshe and Aharon and utilize law as well as love.

With thanks to Rabbi Kenneth N. Hain of Beth Sholom, Lawrence, NY for sharing this idea.



BUILDING A BRIDGE TO ISRAEL



ISRAEL

The New York Times, in honor of Israel's 60th anniversary, recently compiled a double-sided Top-Ten List of ten Americans whose influence impacted on Israel and ten Israelis who have influenced The United States. Here's a summary. What to you think?

Top Ten -- 10 of the Most Influential Americans Who've Impacted Israel

GOLDA MEIR

One of the founding members of the State of Israel and the country's fourth Prime Minister, she immigrated with her family to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1906. A decade later, she became involved in a local chapter of the Labor Zionist Youth Movement. Making use of her impeccable English, she quickly rose to senior positions in the Histadrut and the Jewish Agency. She was one of 24 signatories on Israel's official Declaration of Independence. In 1969, Golda, who was dubbed the "Iron Lady" of politics, became the country's Prime Minister as a representative of the Labor Party.

DAVID APPLEBAUM

The enterprising 50-year-old Chief of Emergency Room and Trauma Services at Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Medical Center was murdered by a suicide bomber on September 9, 2003. Dr. Applebaum, who earned his medical degree from the Medical College of Ohio in 1978, was the American who created the TEREM concept, a chain of immediate-care clinics in several major Israeli cities. Dr. Applebaum revolutionized emergency and trauma care in big-city hospitals by creating a cutting-edge unit at Shaare Zedek Hospital that could deal with a range of simultaneous events, including treating victims of terror attacks, quickly and efficiently.

TAL BRODY

The Israeli basketball legend was born in Trenton, New Jersey 65 years ago. After an excellent career as a star point guard for the University of Illinois, Brody was drafted by the NBA's Baltimore Bullets in 1965. However, after starring for the U.S. at the Maccabiah Games, Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team asked Brody to sign with them. A year later, he helped Maccabi Tel Aviv make it to the European Cup finals. During the 1970's, Brody led Maccabi Tel Aviv to several state championships. The highlight of his career came in 1977 when Maccabi defeated a formidable CSKA Russian team in the European Cup semi-finals. The team eventually went on to win the European championship.

STANLEY FISCHER

The 65-year old Governor of the Bank of Israel was born in Zambia and moved to the U.S. in the late 1960's. He received his Ph.D. in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1969 and went on to become a professor. Fischer also served as Vice Chairman of Citigroup before moving to Israel and becoming Governor of the Bank of Israel in 2005.



RABBI CHAIM PINCHAS SCHEINBERG

The prominent nonagenarian rabbinical scholar heads the Torah Ore Yeshiva in Jerusalem. He was born in Poland but moved to the U.S. when he was nine years old.

Rabbi Scheinberg spent many years as a faculty member and rabbinic administrator at both the New Haven Yeshiva and Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim. In the 1960's he moved to Israel, where he became a renowned rabbinical adjudicator and popular teacher for many American Orthodox teenagers studying in Jerusalem.

SHARI ARISON

The New York-born Israeli businesswoman was tabbed by Forbes Magazine last year as the "richest woman in the Middle East". Ms. Arison's family owns a vast empire of businesses on both sides of the Ocean, including Carnival Cruise Lines and the Miami Heat professional basketball franchise. In Israel, Ms. Arison is involved in helming the country's largest banking concern, Bank Hapoalim.

JON MEDVED

The American-born businessman is one of Israel's leading serial entrepreneurs and venture capitalists. Medved is the co-founder and CEO of Vringo – the leader in video ringtone sharing and next-generation mobile personalization. Medved was a founder and Executive Vice President of Marketing and Sales at MERET Optical Communications, Inc. (Santa Monica, California) between 1982-1991. Medved then moved to Israel where he was part of the founding management team at Accent Software (Nasdaq:ACNTF) where he served as Executive Vice President of Marketing and Sales between 1992-1994.

MOSHE ARENS

Born in Lithuania in 1925, Arens immigrated to the U.S. in 1939 and became an American citizen. With the birth of the State of Israel in 1948, Arens moved to the Jewish state, where he joined the Irgun organization led by Menachem Begin. Arens became actively involved in politics and was elected to the Knesset as a member of the Likud Party in 1973. In 1981, Prime Minister Begin appointed Arens as Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Several years later he became the nation's Defense Minister.

PROF. ROBERT J. AUMANN

The esteemed professor who won the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economics was born in Germany 78 years ago. His family was forced to flee from the Nazis to the U.S. in 1938. He attended yeshiva schools in Manhattan and graduated from the City College of New York with a degree in mathematics. Aumann received a Ph.D. in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is considered a master in the mathematical art of "game theory" and is a professor at the Center for the Study of Rationality at Hebrew University.

MATTHEW BRONFMAN

The native New Yorker has become a major investor in various Israeli business entities, ranging from a controlling interest in Israel Discount Bank, Supersol (the country's largest supermarket chain) and Israel's IKEA franchise. The Harvard Business School graduate is also actively involved in American Jewish organizational life, having been elected Chairman of the Governing Board of the World Jewish Congress in 2007.



Top Ten -- 10 of the Most Influential Israelis Who've Impacted the U.S.

ILAN RAMON

The ill-fated NASA astronaut was born in Ramat Gan. Upon his graduation from high school, he was accepted into the vaunted Israel Air Force, where he rose to the rank of Colonel. In 1981, he was part of an elite group of pilots that bombed Iraq's nearly completed Osiraq nuclear reactor. As the first-ever Israeli citizen chosen for the program, Mr. Ramon along with his wife and children moved to Houston, Texas in 1997 for five-plus years on intensive training. Eventually, he was tapped for Columbia's 16-day science mission, which began with a picturesque liftoff from Florida on January 16, 2003 and ended tragically when the shuttle disintegrated over Texas on February 1.

GENE SIMMONS

The rock icon was born in Haifa, as Chaim Witz. He immigrated to the U.S. with his mother when he was eight years old, changing his name to Eugene Klein and then eventually to Gene Simmons. Mr. Simmons began to play in different rock 'n roll bands. In time, he began to create his own rock groups, frequently changing names and tinkering with various styles until KISS took the rock world by storm in 1974.

NATALIE PORTMAN

The stunning Hollywood star who was born in Jerusalem as Natalie Hershlag moved to Washington, D.C. with her Israeli father (a prominent endocrinologist) and American mother when she was three years old. In June 2003, Ms. Portman graduated from Harvard University with a degree in psychology. However, moviegoers will forever associate her with the exotic role of interstellar space queen Amidala in the "Star Wars" film saga.

HAIM SABAN

The television and mass media mogul, who was born in Egypt and moved to Israel after the 1956 Suez War, started his show-biz career as a music concert promoter in the Jewish state. In 1975, Mr. Saban moved to France where he found success by adapting Japanese animated children's TV series for the French market. Mr. Saban moved to Los Angeles, where he co-founded Saban Entertainment that focused on producing popular musical scores for a wide array of children's TV series. Saban Entertainment became a hot media property when it adapted a variety of children's Japanese TV programs including "Power Rangers" and "VR Troopers" for American television.

CHAIM TOPOL

Born in Tel Aviv, Topol began to show promise as a multi-talented thespian while performing in army troupes. By the mid-1960's Topol had started to make a significant impact in Hollywood, after receiving a Golden Globe Award for his performance in the Israeli film, "Sallah Shabati." In 1966 he made his first English language appearance in the big budget Hollywood biopic, "Cast A Giant Shadow". Topol was nominated for an Oscar, based on his legendary performance as Tevye, in the Hollywood screen version of "Fiddler on the Roof".

ISAAC TSHUVA

He is renowned as one of Israel's most successful global entrepreneurs, with significant investments in energy, real estate and financial services. Tshuva is the controlling shareholder of the publicly traded company, Delek Group, one of Israel's largest and most dynamic holding companies. Mr. Tshuva is the owner of the world-famous luxury hotel brand "The Plaza", which Delek intends to expand worldwide. His company bought Manhattan's Plaza Hotel in 2004, turning it into one of New York's most luxurious assets.



ARNON MILCHAN

The Hollywood powerbroker and filmmaker was born in Tel Aviv. He transformed his family's fertilizer company into a hugely successful chemical corporation. He began to dabble in the movie business by bankrolling flicks for big name directors such as Martin Scorsese and Sergio Leone. Mr. Milchan set-up his own company called New Regency, which has spawned a long list of box-office hits, including "Pretty Woman", "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," and "My Super Ex-Girlfriend."

MICHAL NEGRIN

She has spurred a fashion revolution for women who seek unique and romantic designer jewelry, as well as one-of-a-kind home décor items. Ms. Negrin has succeeded in capturing a significant share of the designer jewelry markets -- New York City, Las Vegas, London, Rome and Tokyo. She designed the flag pin for Israel's Olympic team in Beijing, China.

ELIE TAHARI

The 56 year old fashion designer has been creating sexy and sophisticated women's wardrobes for nearly three decades. After growing up in an Israel orphanage and then serving in the Israeli Air Force, Tahari made his way to New York, where he began working in Manhattan's garment industry. Elie Tahari is a "global lifestyle brand" consisting of womenswear, menswear and accessories that are sold in more than 50 countries.

SHAYA BOYMELGREEN

In 1969, he arrived in the U.S. as a young student from Israel, looking to pursue his religious studies. Nearly 40 years later, Mr. Boymelgreen has become the master of his own global financial, real estate and hotel empires. Through his various companies, including Azorim, Engel, Boymelgreen Developers and Boymelgreen Capital, he has developed a wide array of residential properties in New York City and Houston, Texas, Toronto and Israel. Mr. Boymelgreen owns a sizeable portfolio of upscale hotels in Israel.

TIME TO GO

This is the 85th COMPACT, *Tevet 5769*. Enrich your life as a Jew. Transformation is a step-by-step process of learning and questioning, of doing and inquiring, of participating and asking.

Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, the USCJ Executive Vice President, welcomes your comments about COMPACT (epstein@uscj.org)

Rabbi Moshe Edelman, the USCJ Director of Congregational Programming, prepares and edits COMPACT (edelman@uscj.org).



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16 Tevet 5770 – Jan. 2, 2010

11 Tevet 5771 – Dec. 18, 2010

12 Tevet 5772 – Jan. 7, 2012

16 Tevet 5773 – Dec. 29, 2012

11 Tevet 5774 – Dec. 14, 2013

12 Tevet 5775 – Jan. 3, 2015

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