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COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET

This week's edition is sponsored
Leiluy Nishmat Yedidya Ben
Chorshit Z'L. Tihyeh Nishmato
Betsurat Hachaim

YITRO

20th Shevat 5776
Shabbat begins: 16:29
Shabbat ends: 17:36



RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL
DIRECTOR, TAL

It's Time For A Reality Check!

In the year 5776 what kind of a world are we living in? Given historical trends, would you say the world has become more violent or peaceful?

War seems more widespread than ever; Israel, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, etc. Violence on the streets seems to be growing too. Yet in 2011 Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker concluded that we are actually living in one of the most peaceful times in history. Pinker pointed out that during World War II, the human population lost 300 of every 100,000 people each year. During the Korean War it was in the 20s, before dropping into the teens during the Vietnam era. In the 1980s and 1990s, it fell into the single digits. For most of the 21st century it's been below one war death per 100,000 people per year.

Lately however there has been an uptick globally as a result of the civil war in Syria, doubling from 0.5 per 100,000 to 1. But Pinker says "you can't compare 1 with 15 or 25 or 300."

This finding has sparked a rigorous debate between some of the world's most prominent thinkers.

Compared to our anarchic beginnings, levels of violence are at an all-time low and the "Long Peace" after the Second World War is, for now, still with us.

But when confronted with tragic events such as those in Israel, Tunisia, Kuwait France and

many more, Pinker's conclusion offers little solace.

There are many that argue that we are living in changing times and things are starting to get out of control. What could be the cause of this perceived or real increase in violence? What should we be focusing on to change the words path to a peaceful future?

The mouth is one of our most potent weapons. Our world was created at the *word* of G-d, to teach the power of communication. It is in this week's Parasha that we read how the Presence of G-d Almighty descended on Har Sinai, as the entire united people witnessed the giving of the Ten Commandments.

The world was created with G-d's word and the Torah is the word of G-d.

Our sages (Yalkut Shimoni 250) relate that the entire Torah was included in the Ten



Commandments and the Ten Commandments were uttered in one word. Before we begin our journey as a nation we are taught the importance of speech, and in the first commandment we are taught the importance of belief in One G-d that is everlasting and Just.

The sixth commandment relates "You shall not murder." (20:13)

Note the Torah does not say do not kill (Taharog), rather it says (loosely translated) do not murder – Lo Tirtsach.

If "You shall not kill" were the proper translation, no person who took the Ten Commandments seriously could kill in self-defence, even if it meant loss of the threatened person's life, or could kill in warfare, even if his or her country were attacked. There are therefore times when we are allowed to kill, but there is no such time when it comes to Retsach – murder.

The Talmud teaches that he who destroys a single soul is as if he destroyed an entire world.

Each of us is a world unto ourselves, intersecting with the worlds of other people – parents, kids, other relatives, friends, but there is a world that exists that we are at the centre of. Murder someone and you have destroyed that world, and damaged the worlds of others who would have been influenced by that world.

Rabbi Akiva states: "Beloved is a man, for he was created in



1. The ten commandments are comprised of two groups reflected in the two Luchos. Why not have all ten on one Luach?
2. Are there any connections between the two sets of five commandments in the Luchos?
3. How many letters are there in the ten commandments and how is this significant?
4. What is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah?

Answers On Page 3

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the image of God... Beloved are Israel, for they were given a precious vessel (the Torah)..."

G-d tells us that we are to be "My own treasure from among all peoples; for the earth is Mine. And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation..." (Shemot 19:5-6)

Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno, the great Italian Sage explains this further:

"The entire human race is more precious to me than the lowly animals... but you will be my 'kingdom of priests' to help the human race understand and to teach it to call upon the Almighty in prayer and to worship Him in unison. That is the future role of Israel."

Our role is to lead by example. Utilise that powerful mouth in prayer, worship the Almighty and help the world understand.

Yet the world we live in has changed dramatically over the past few years.

With the conception of the internet, and global reach of media together with Facebook, twitter and the ease to video real live barbaric scenes we have entered a new frightening age.



RABBI MORDECHAI NISSIM
AM SEGULA

Techiyat Hametim & TU BISHVAT

This week is TU BISHVAT the new year of trees. What lesson can we learn from a tree? Every Jew has an obligation to believe in *Techiyat Hametim* the resurrection of the righteous souls who have departed from this world. It is considered such a fundamental rule in the holy Torah that Rambam classifies it as one of the 13 fundamentals of faith, in Jewish law. And, one who denies this principle forfeits a place in the world to come. On the other hand, those of us who believe it, will experience *Techiyat Hametim* and thereby merit eternal life forever.

The first time we encounter the concept of eternal life, is in Gan Eden, the place that Adam and Chava used to dwell in. In the garden of Eden, there was a tree, called the tree of life. Radvaz says that if Adam would have chosen to eat from that tree instead of the tree of knowledge, he would have received eternal life.

Perhaps we can suggest that receiving eternal life would have been Adam's fulfilment of *Techiyat Hametim*. *Techiyat Hametim* is the final destiny for mankind,

The younger generation that is growing up into this is being affected on a daily basis.

When a terrorist acts with barbarism it is because they have lost their ability to view their victim as a human created in the 'image of G-d.'

In 1997, high-school student David Merrell conducted an interesting experiment to examine the influence of various kinds of music.

He built a maze and put some mice through it. The time it took for the mice to complete the maze was about ten minutes. He then divided the mice into three groups, and started to play music to two of the three groups for ten hours a day. To one group he played classical music, to the other, hard rock. Then, at the end of three weeks he put all the mice through the maze three times a week for three weeks.

The control group who had heard no music, managed to cut five minutes off their original time. The classical mice reduced their time by eight and a half minutes; and the hard rock mice took twenty minutes *longer* to find their way through the maze.

and it signifies the eternal state, the ultimate achievement of the perfection of societies and the completion of the history of our universe. In other words, Adam's sin in effect caused a delay in the ultimate historical journey to the state of *Techiyat Hametim*.

Why does the holy Torah choose the symbol of a tree to teach this important idea?

The Talmud (Ta'anit) reminds us that there are 2 types of trees. The date-palm is a fruit-bearing tree that symbolizes the Tzaddik that is good for himself, and benefits the world because he has students, who are like his fruits. However, the Cedar tree is a non-fruit-bearing tree that is like the Tzaddik who is benefits himself, but not useful to society as he has no students.

Techiyat Hametim, the resurrection of the dead is not just an abstract idea that seems irrelevant to our lives, rather it reflects and describes our entire existence.

Another Medrash teaches us that in the garden of Eden, the actual tree (the branches and bark) used to taste like its fruits. However, after the sin of Adam & Chava, the tree decided to change Hashem's rule and stopped tasting like its

Unfortunately the project had to be cut short because, as David said, "all the hard rock mice killed each other. None of the classical mice did that at all."

When the Bnei Yisrael exited the sea, they burst out in praise and song of G-d. There was unity and the spiritual high led them forward. Songs have the ability to impact. The holy words can penetrate the soul.

Yet songs can also be destructive in nature. If the lyrics are immoral then it can make people like mice subconsciously go mad. If you get your view of the world from the news, you're always going to think that we're living in violent times. But even worse, it will eventually affect your habits. Things that were once terrible to view, now become the norm and as a society we are lowering our level.

Torah brings life, it keeps us on a just path. Keep strong in the face of this social media manipulation, value the life of others as we were all created in the image of G-d. Through unity the world can be a better place.

Sometimes we need to switch off in order to switch on.

fruits. Why is this so? And what does this teach us?

Perhaps we can suggest that before the sin of Adam & Chava, there was no concept of the fruit being separate to the tree, because they were one and the same thing.

The entire process of gestation, development and production did not need to exist. In other words the *process* and the *result* were the same. The Ramchal describes how it will be in the future world *Olam Habbah*. There will be no need any more to have a process, since there will be a constant state which is the results of our achievements. Our present existence is a *world of action* - *Olam Ha'avodah*, but the future world is a *world of reward* - *Olam Haschar*. A similar example is given in a Medrash, there won't be a need for 9 months of pregnancy, and children will be born instantaneously.

The Torah states "*Hayom La'asotam*", today is to do (the mitzvot). The Talmud (Avodah Zara) explains "*Hayom La'asotam Umachar Lekabel Scharam*", today (this world) is for doing, but tomorrow (the next world) is for receiving the reward.

We learn from this that the purpose of this world is *to do*. To keep Torah and Mitzvot, and to be productive in life, not to sit back and be inactive. However, the purpose of the world to come, is just to sit in the radiance of Hashem and enjoy the perfection of our actions. The Talmud (Kallah 2) says "*Tzadikim Yosheim Ve'atroteyhem Berosham Venehenim Miziv Hashchina*" - The righteous sit with their crowns on their head and bask in the radiance of the Divine Presence.

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Another lesson we can learn from the tree example is as follows. We started by saying that every Jew must believe in the resurrection of the dead. After a person leaves this world their bodies lie in wait for the resurrection. This can be compared to a tree in the winter that appears dead. Yet in the summer it comes alive with fruit.

Adam & Chava were born to be eternal but when they sinned, they brought death into the world.

With this understanding, now we can answer why the tree decided to stop tasting like the fruit. Since, now that we need the process of Torah and Mitzvot, the result will only come after the work is done. Therefore the tree will only produce its fruit after a process of gestation. Similarly we find that our Rabbis compare *Techiyat Hametim* to a seed that seems dead, but when put into the ground

to gestate, comes alive and produces an entire tree.

We can now see that *Techiyat Hametim*, the resurrection of the dead is not just an abstract idea that seems irrelevant to our lives, rather it reflects and describes our entire existence. It is a pathway and purpose of life that leads to an eternal future of a perfect existence, symbolized by the fruit. Someone who does not realize this, misses the whole point of creation and why we are here. After the Bnei Yisrael went through the splitting of the sea they sang a song of *Shira* with the words *Az Yashir, then they will sing*. Rashi quotes the Talmud that learns out from here a proof for *Techiyat Hametim*.

We can learn out from this, that every deliverance from trouble is in effect, a celebration of the *fruits of our suffering*, of our *labour* and our *efforts*. The end result is the song, which expresses all the efforts of the *process*.

We sing *Shira* every day in the Shachrit prayer. One of the verses includes the words "*Teviyamo Vetitayemo*", *bring us come to it and make taste it!*

With our explanation above we can appreciate fully what these words mean. Only after toiling and going through the process of our life, in this world, can we then reach the fruits of this world, which is only experienced in the next world. That's why we sing "Teviyamo Vetitayemo", bring us come to it and make taste it!

And then our effort which like the tree, will taste just like the fruit, and we will once again reach eternity, since the fruit of the tree is everlasting life.

May this Tu Bishvat message be fulfilled in our days and we merit to experience the *Tzmichat Hageulah* and the building of our holy city Yerushalayim, *Bimhera Beyameinu, Amen.*



STORIES OF OUR
CHACHAMIM

Tzedakah

The following story is about a community sponsored inn for needy travellers in the Lithuanian town of Kovno, and the story takes place in the late 19th century.

A beggar once entered the town to collect money, and he was provided with shelter in the Jewish community's inn for poor travellers.

The very first evening, as he was undressing, a huge wad of paper money fell from his pocket. When

the other beggars in the room saw the value of the paper money - far more valuable than anything he could have collected in Kovno - they realized that this beggar was actually a wealthy man!

The news soon spread through the entire town. The people of the town were angry that a "millionaire" disguised as a beggar had tried to exploit them, especially since the majority of the Jews of Kovno were poor working people who were struggling to survive.

The Jewish City Council therefore decided to pass a new law forbidding beggars from collecting tzedakah in Kovno. The Rabbi of Kovno, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spector, was a leading sage of the generation. When he heard about the proposed law, he immediately went before the council and asked for permission to speak.

He began by assuring the members of the council that he truly understood their anger and frustration. "But," said the sage, "before you take action, it would be wise to think. Who, would you say, deceived whom?" The council members replied: "That strange beggar from another town fooled us. Dressed as a poor beggar, he took our tzedakah money right and left - and he is really quite rich!"

"True," replied Rabbi Spector, "But in that case, you were fooled not by a poor man, but by a *wealthy* man. It is therefore unfair to retaliate by passing a law against poor beggars.

Pass a severe law, if it pleases you, that tzedakah may never again be given to the rich, but only to the needy!"

(This story can be found in "Ethics from Sinai" by Irving Bunim, Vol. 3, p.121, Feldheim Publishers.)



1. The first five commandments deal with the mitzvot *Bein Odom LeMokom*, man and Hashem, while the second deal with *Bein Odom Lechaveiro*, man and his fellow.

2. Rashi in Shir Hashirim (4:5) brings the comparisons between each parallel commandment. I am Hashem opposite do not kill since a killer minimises the G-dlike form of man. You should not have other gods opposite adultery since the action reflects the same unfaithfulness to the partner. Not saying Hashem's Name in vain opposite stealing since a robber will end up swearing falsely. Remembering Shabbos opposite not to give false testimony as profaning Shabbos is like giving false testimony against Hashem. Honouring parents opposite jealousy since a jealous man will end up with a child who will not honour him.

3. The Baal Haturim (20:13) brings that they contain 620 letters alluding to the 613 Torah Mitzvot and the seven Noachide Laws. 620 is the gematria of *keser*, crown, that comes when we do all of these.

4. Rashi (19:2) brings that what is needed is Achdus, unity. We find the same thing by Megillas Ester where the problem was that the Jews were an *Am Mifuzor*, a nation spread out, meaning having arguments. However, the salvation came about when - *Leich Kinos as Kol Hayehudim*, they gathered together in unity. This resulted in a reacceptance of Torah, *Kemu Vekiblu*.

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