

SHEMITA: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS SERMON DIGEST

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**“Shemittas Kesafim: Freeing Ourselves From Materialism”
Parshas Ki Seitze, September 6, 2014**

A tragedy occurred a week and a half ago that would not have if the NY building code were consistent with this morning's *parsha*. Cindy Yeh, a 23 year old intern at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan, was with a group of friends on the rooftop of their building in Brooklyn when she went too close to the edge and fell to her tragic death. Following the incident the Department of Buildings issued a violation to the condo saying that people were not allowed to be on the roof.

Being on the roof was one violation, but from a Torah perspective, the building was guilty of a second violation as well. “*Ki sivneh bayis chadash v'asisa ma'akeh l'gagecha, v'lo sasim damim b'veisecha ki yipol ha'nofeil mi'menu*. When you build a new house you must make a fence on the roof so that you will not place blood in your house if a fallen person falls from it.”

This *pasuk* is the Torah obligation, one of the 613 mitzvos, to build a fence or railing on all dangerous places including around swimming pools, on balconies, rooftops, and staircases. The *gemara* (Bava Basra 51) says the *halacha* requires the guard rail to be a minimum of ten *tefachim*, about three and a third feet high and it must be designed to withstand the weight of an average person leaning against it. The *gemara* (Bava Kamma 15b and Kesuvos 41b) learns a corollary of the law that you cannot have anything dangerous in your home like a violent dog or a flimsy ladder.

The Rambam (Hilchos Berachos 11:8) and Chayei Adom say that this *mitzvah* like so many others requires a *beracha* and therefore before we build or have someone install a railing or fence on a roof or balcony we should recite – “*asher kideshanu b'mitzvosav vetzivonu la'asos ma'akeh*.”

While the *pasuk* about placing a fence on our roofs is meant to be taken literally and indeed introduces a practical mitzvah as we just discussed, many have interpreted these words to be telling us a deeper message and broader imperative as well.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains - *ki sivneh bayis chadash*, if you build or acquire a new home, to have a place for your material possessions, to reside, to live, to accumulate things, to park your car and hang your flat screen and display your silver, *v'asisa ma'akeh l'gagecha*, put a boundary around it; put up a fence.

Understand that there is nothing wrong with having all of those things, enjoying them, and using them. But, put up a fence - don't ever confuse your house or your car or your nice watch or elaborate wine collection with who you are. Have nice things, enjoy the comforts of life, but don't ever confuse them with what truly matters or allow them to define who you are.

For if you don't put up such a fence, continues Rabbeinu Bachya, if you don't put your material possessions in a context, in a frame and in a perspective, if you allow them to

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consume your attention, to define you, to motivate you - *ki yipol ha'nofeil*, you will surely fall. He points out that it doesn't say you may fall, but you will fall. The materialism, the quest for more, the inflated ego, the insatiable appetite for more, will bring you down, sabotage your life and bring misery to your family.

This week we begin our sermon series on the topic of *shemita*, as next year will be a sabbatical year in which farmers in Israel will take a break from working their fields and allow them to lay fallow. Though we are not farmers in Israel, the mitzvah of *shemita* and the philosophy of a sabbatical year have many critical messages for us, some of which we will be discussing over the next few weeks.

Shemitas karka, not working the land, forces the farmer to stop for one year every seven and not try to accumulate more. I read an interview with Ariel Porat, an Israeli farmer that was conducted seven years ago, when Israel observed the last *shemita*. He said, "I believe that *shemita* served as a kind of social or economic regulator, one that lowered the level of competition and restrained the wild pursuit of materialism. We need to revive that in modern society.... Things are not like they were in the past, when most of the nation engaged in agriculture. Since farmers have now become a small minority, we need to find a way to enable *shemita* to serve its regulatory function again in society."

The Ben Ish Chai says the laws of building a fence or railing apply to an old house or a new one, so why does it specifically say *bayis chadash*, when you build a new home? He answers, that the *pasuk* is referring to someone who wants a fresh start, to build a new spiritual home. If we want to transform our lives, he says, we can have a *bayis chadash*, a new beginning by building a *ma'akeh*, making a fence around our pursuit of the physical, enjoying it, but within limits.

A fantastic NY Times article called "Love People, Not Things" describes a, "2009 study from the University of Rochester tracking the success of 147 recent graduates in reaching their stated goals after graduation. Some had "intrinsic" goals, such as deep, enduring relationships. Others had "extrinsic" goals, such as achieving reputation or fame. The scholars found that intrinsic goals were associated with happier lives. But the people who pursued extrinsic goals experienced more negative emotions, such as shame and fear. They even suffered more physical maladies. People who rate materialistic goals like wealth as top personal priorities are significantly likelier to be more anxious, more depressed and more frequent drug users, and even to have more physical ailments than those who set their sights on more intrinsic values."

The upcoming *shemita* year is a perfect opportunity to recalibrate our goals and spend a year with greater focus on the intrinsic ones rather than just the extrinsic ones. Yes, we should always aspire for greater professional success, and yes, many in this room are working hard just to get by. But *shemita* tells all of us to take a year off from the rat-race of wanting to have more and more of the extrinsic things, and dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of the intrinsic ones.

Art Buchwald put it best when he once said, "the best things in life aren't things."

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We have begun Elul and we are now preparing our priorities and goals for the coming year. *Ki sivneh bayis chadash*, we have the opportunity for a new beginning to metaphorically build our homes anew. Let's be careful to put a roof around our houses physically and spiritually and plan for an incredible *shemita* year in which we achieve all of our intrinsic goals from better relationships, more meaning, and greater faith, bringing us only happiness and true satisfaction.

**“For the Land is Mine: The Uniqueness of the Land of Israel”
Parshas Ki Savo September 13, 2014**

The news this week has been consumed by the growth of the ISIS terrorist organization and the announcement that the United States will be escalating our fight against them. Also in the news was the commemoration of 9/11, the indefinite suspension of Ray Rice for domestic violence, the spread of Ebola and the long awaited release of the brand new iPhone 6.

Long forgotten and almost never mentioned are the missing Malaysian Airlines plane that still has not be found, the tragic death of Robin Williams, and for most of the world, the kidnapping and murder of 3 Israeli boys. These news items have been moved into the history bin with more current events taking their place in our inbox, on the news and in our hearts and minds.

Here is the question I want to pose to you this morning: Is Israel like every other part of the news cycle, a subject that we were connected to when it was front and center, but quickly replaced by more current news? Or, while other crisis, incidents and events are subject to the rapidly shifting news cycle, do Israel and her people remain a permanent focus of our attention and concern?

During Operation Protective Edge, many of us checked the Israeli news websites at least hourly. Since calm has been restored, do we continue to at least check them daily, keeping informed and educated about Israel? When rockets were falling throughout Israel, we added extra *tehillim* to our prayers. Since the ceasefire, we have stopped the extra *tehillim*, but do we at least continue to concentrate when Israel is mentioned in our regular prayers and when saying the *mi'shebeirach* for soldiers? Are the feelings of unity and connection with the Jewish people across the globe and the unbreakable bond with Israel we all felt this summer a fleeting memory, or have we made them a permanent part of who we are, how we behave, and what we feel?

“*V'haya ki savo el ha'aretz asher Hashem Elokecha nosein lecha nachala virishta v'yashavta bah.* When you enter the Land that Hashem gives you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and inhabit it.” Our *parsha* begins by telling us the laws of *Bikurim*, the first fruit the farmer produces that must be brought to Yerushalayim and given to Hashem in ceremonial fashion.

The Sifrei comments, “Perform the mitzvah mentioned in this context in reward for which you will enter the Land.” R' Yaakov Filber in his *Chemdas Yamim* quotes the Chassam Sofer, Rav Moshe Sofer of 18th century Pressburg, who asks the obvious question: The laws of *Bikurim* only apply to the farmer in Israel. So how can the *Midrash* suggest that only in the merit of the fulfillment of *Bikurim* will we successfully acquire and inhabit the Land? The cause and effect seems entirely out of order.

Moreover, wonders the Chassam Sofer, we have a similar anomaly when we mention Israel in *benching* each time we eat bread. We say, “*nodeh lecha Hashem Elokeinu al*

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she'hinchalta la'avoseinu eretz chemda tova u'rechava v'al she'hotzeisanu Hashem Elokeinu mei'erezt Mitzrayim, We thank you Hashem for giving our forefathers an inheritance of a desirable good and the spacious Land and for taking us out of the Land of Egypt.” The order is wrong. Shouldn't we first thank Hashem for taking us out of Egypt and only then for bringing us into the land, in the same order in which it occurred?

The Chassam Sofer's response not only answers his questions, but articulates a basic axiom and foundational tenet of Torah Judaism. He explains that Israel is a geographical location in the Middle East, a plot of Land. But Israel is also so much more. It is the symbol of our covenant with Hashem. It is the place promised to us by Him. It is our ancestral homeland. It is our birthright. It is the only place of prophecy. It is a unique land in which *mitzvos* can be accomplished through earth and soil, and it is much more.

This week we continue our sermon series on *Shemita* with an emphasis on the Torah's description of taking a year off from working the Land to remember that the “Land is Mine” it belongs to Hashem. The Seforno says that while *hashamayim shamayim la'Shem, v'haaretz nasan livnei adam*, Israel is the exception and remains in the sole possession of Hashem. It is unique, and *shemita* reminds us of that.

True, says the Chassam Sofer, the geographical location wasn't entered or inhabited until after we were first taken out of Egypt. True, the mitzvah of *bikurim* is only observed after entering the land, not before it. However, while geographically the *Midrash* and our *benching* are out of order, spiritually, they are chronological. Eretz Yisroel became the focus, central part of our national identity, our prayers, thoughts and longings long before we ever entered it. Wherever we roamed in the world, whatever the zip code of our bodies, Israel was the address of our hearts.

When Yaakov's children descended to Egypt they told Pharaoh, *lagur ba'aretz banu*, we have come to visit in the land, but not to permanently settle there. After Yosef and his brothers died, the people felt settled in Egypt, disconnected from Israel, and thus became vulnerable to Pharaoh's harsh decrees.

When the farmer brings *bikkurim* he references this attitude – *arami oveid avi...vayagar sham bimsei m'at*, we temporarily stayed there, but then we grew mighty, large and settled and *vayarei'u osanu ha'mitzrim*.

Concludes the Chassam Sofer, as long as the Jews keep Israel in their consciousness, focus and longing, we are safe in exile. As soon as we build an identity independent of our Homeland and we transform the Diaspora into a permanent home rather than an exile, we become vulnerable.

R' Meir Simcha of Dvinsk was born in Lithuania in 1843 and was a prominent Rav in Poland. In his commentary on Chumash published posthumously but written in his lifetime, called *Meshech Chochma*, he wrote presciently, "They think that Berlin is Jerusalem...from there will come the storm winds that will uproot them."

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Of course, we would never, God forbid, suggest a reason or cause for the Holocaust. But the words of the Chassam Sofer ring in our ears. No matter where we may geographically live, Israel must remain part of our focus, in our hearts and on our minds.

Hungarian born R' Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal Hy'd was staunchly anti-Zionist. When running and hiding from the Nazis, everything changed for him and he saw a return to Israel as Hashem's true plan for us. In his incredible book *Eim Ha'Banim Semeicha*, written by memory and while in hiding, he shares these prophetic words:

“Now, even though all of Israel will not return right away, it seems to me that the Land will become a universal center for the entire Jewish nation, by the very fact that there will be an assembly of Jews in Jerusalem and Eretz Yisrael. Even those who remain in the Diaspora will keep their eyes and hearts on the Land. They will be bound and connected with all their souls to the universal center which will be established in Eretz Yisrael. It will unite them even in the Diaspora, and they will not be considered dispersed at all...”

Operation Protective Edge is over. Quiet has been restored, at least for now, to Israel and it is no longer talked about in the news. But, while for the news it is part of history, for us Israel must remain a current event every day. We must remain united, even in the Diaspora, and only then can we accomplish *kibutz galiyos*, if not geographically yet, at least spiritually.

**“Taking a Sabbatical to Work on Our Faith”
Netzavim/Va’Yeilech September 20, 2014**

Aharon was born in Fulda, Germany in 1922. His father died when he was 9 years old, leaving him the man of the house, responsible for helping to raise his younger sister and brother together with his mother, with whom he grew exceptionally close. November 9, 1938 is a night that will go down in infamy. A German diplomat had been assassinated and in response Germans rose up in a pogrom against their Jewish neighbors resulting in over 1,000 shuls being burned, 7,000 Jewish businesses destroyed and 30,000 German Jews deported to concentration camps. This horrific day became known as *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass.

One of the towns that had a quota to round up Jews and send them to concentration camps was Fulda. Aharon was 16 years old, just a boy. He never should have been included, but one of the Rabbis of the town hid leaving one more spot and so the Nazis took Aharon to Buchenwald. He spent six very long and tortuous weeks there in which he saw and experienced unimaginable suffering that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Because of his young age, Aharon qualified to go on a *kindertransport*, and so he returned home for a very short time before leaving with his younger sister and brother to Holland. Soon after they arrived, Aharon found someone willing to sponsor an affidavit for him to come to America. He had a relative in New York, the Rosenwalds, who were part owners of Sears Roebuck and Company. There was only one problem. Saturday was the busiest day of the week in the retail business and they would only agree to bring him to America to work for them if he would commit to work on Shabbos, a small price to pay for saving his life, they felt. They didn’t just ask for a verbal commitment. They wanted him to sign a contract that he would work on Shabbos before they would go ahead and sponsor him.

Sixteen-year-old Aharon did not know what to do. On the one hand, obviously his life lay in the balance and even at that age he knew well that one should violate all but the three cardinal sins to save a life. On the other hand, he was raised in a religious community and deeply committed family. He pictured his father, of blessed memory, and his mother from whom he had been separated. He didn’t know what to do.

“Ha’chaim v’hamaves nasati lefanecha ha’beracha v’hakelala, u’vacharta bachaim l’maan tichyeh atah v’zarecha. L’ahava es Hashem Elokecha lishmo’a b’kolo u’ledavka vo... I have placed life and death before you and your offspring – to love Hashem your God, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him...” R’ Moshe Feinstein asks if you are choosing life, *u’vacharta ba’chaim*, isn’t it obvious that *tichyeh*, you will live? Why does the *pasuk* promise if you choose life you will be alive?

Rav Ovadia Seforno, the great 16th century Italian commentator suggests that life doesn’t mean physical existence in this world, but means choose eternal life in the world to come. In other words, he explains, Moshe is encouraging us to make the proper and correct

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choices in this world so that we can achieve immortality and experience a pleasant eternity.

However, most *meforshim* don't understand *chayim* in this context as the afterlife, but rather explain that we should choose a meaningful, purposeful, inspired and elevated life in this world in order to truly be alive in the here and now.

The Ibn Ezra has an incredible interpretation. The *pesukim* say choose life so that you and your children will live, "*L'ahava es Hashem Elokecha*, to love Hashem..." The simple understanding is that "to love Hashem" is describing the choice we should make and is going on *u'bachara ba'chayim*. However, the Ibn Ezra says it refers not to the choice we should make but the result that we merit from making the choice to live, and is going on *l'maan tichye*, we will merit a life of loving Hashem. In other words, "Choose life so that you and your children will live to love Hashem."

The words of the Ibn Ezra are cryptic and difficult to understand. "Choose life and the result will be you and your children loving Hashem." What does that mean?

Sixteen-year-old Aharon took his impossible dilemma about signing a contract that he would work on Shabbos to a Rabbi. The Rabbi told him unequivocally that he must sign since it is the only way to save his life. But then the Rabbi took the teenagers hand and held it in his own and said, "Look me in the eyes and promise me that you will always keep Shabbos." The boy said yes, signed the contract and shortly after set sail for America.

When he arrived on Ellis Island he was placed in a holding cell. Since he was a minor, the Immigration Judge was not prepared to allow him entrance and said unless someone came to take responsibility for him, he would be sent back to Germany. Thank God, the Rosenwalds soon came and completed the necessary paperwork to take Aharon with them. For six months they helped him and supported him while he went to school to learn English, American History and about American culture.

Then the day Aharon dreaded finally arrived and the Rosenwalds told him he would have to go to work. Apply yourself, work hard seven days a week, they told him, and you will have a bright future in our company and can earn a great living. They wanted to send him to their headquarters in Minnesota and reminded him about his commitment to work on Shabbos. Once again, he was faced with an impossible choice, to honor his word and dishonor the Shabbos or to violate his commitment but stay true to his values.

He turned to the Rosenwalds and said that while he feels terrible and apologizes from the depths of his heart, he simply cannot work on Shabbos. What about the commitment, they challenged him. He explained that he had an even higher commitment and he couldn't violate it. They told him, this is your only chance. If you don't work on Shabbos, we will have nothing to do with you, and so it was. He was sixteen years old, utterly on his own, with absolutely nothing to his name and nowhere to go.

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He found a job assembling wallets in a factory that allowed him not to work on Shabbos. It wasn't long before he learned that the Nazis had taken over Holland and sent his sister and brother first to Bergen Belsen and then to Sobibor where they were killed. His beloved mother was taken to the Riga Ghetto where she ultimately died.

To make a long story short, Aharon was drafted into the American Army, married when he returned and had five children. He worked diligently to provide for his family and worked tirelessly to provide them with a Jewish education, something he placed great value on since his had been cut short. His children grew, married and had children of their own. He was finally going to slow down and enjoy life when his daughter and granddaughter were killed in a tragic fire.

To say it was a setback is a gross understatement, but he found the ability nevertheless to continue to choose life and live with faith, no matter the questions, doubt and challenges that certainly plagued him. He and his wife made *aliyah* in their seventies with a tremendous love for the people of Israel and the miracle of the State of Israel. He split his time between Israel and Miami Beach.

Aharon died this week at 92 years old. He came to this country as a sixteen-year-old boy with absolutely nothing. He had lost his father at nine years old and everyone else in the Holocaust and after surviving the worst atrocity in the history of humanity, he buried a child and grandchild. He had every excuse in the world to abandon faith, to reject Hashem, to violate Shabbos and to put Judaism behind him. But he didn't.

Not only did he not reject *Hashem*, but the longer he lived, the closer he became with the Almighty. He used to refer to God as *Hashem Yisborach* and he talked about Him like they were best friends. In fact, on his deathbed, he expressed nothing but gratitude to his friend *Hashem Yisborach* for the good life he was granted and for all the blessing he merited to receive. You might think this is an exaggeration, and I am not sure I would believe it myself, had I not been at his bedside and hear it myself.

U'vacharta ba'chayim, choose life, *l'maan tichye atah v'zar'echa l'ahava es Hashem*. Says the Ibn Ezra, choose life so that you and your children **will live to love Hashem**. When you are faced with adversity, challenges and obstacles, when it seems like there is no God and nothing makes sense, when you come on hard times or moments that are filled with doubt and uncertainty – choose to focus on life, not the death that surrounds you. Choose to be positive even when you have every right to be negative. Choose to see blessing even when you would be entitled to feel cursed. Choose to express gratitude even when you have so many understandable complaints and grievances. The result, *l'maan tichye*, if this is how you live your life, you and your children will live to love Hashem.

Aharon was Reb Aharon ben Yehuda Ha'Levi, Arnold Goldsmith *zichrono livracha*. He came to America at sixteen by himself and when he departed the world this week, he left behind 19 grandchildren and 49 great-grandchildren who are *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*, proud, devoted Jews. One of those grandchildren is my wife Yocheved and seven of

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those great-grandchildren are my daughters and son. Some of you knew him and many of you met him when he stayed with us for Shabbos or Yom Tov.

I am sharing his story this week not as a personal privilege and not because I was close with him and loved him very much. I am telling you his story because it deserves to be told whether I was related to him or not.

We asked him, Opa, why do you think you merited such longevity and how were you blessed to literally create generations that are proud, observant Jews? His answer came immediately. “It is because I chose to keep Shabbos in the most difficult of circumstances and it is because my family saw me choose life and choose happiness and choose to be close with *Hashem Yisborach*, despite everything I went through.”

This Shabbos we continue the *derasha* series on *Shemita* with a focus on the sabbatical year as an opportunity to work on *Eminah*. Every seventh year, the farmer is asked by the Torah to leave his land fallow, to not plant or harvest, and to basically forfeit income for a year. The *Kli Yakar* explains that the mitzvah of *shmita* is an exercise in *emunah*. For six years we work diligently but we run the risk of *kochi v'otzem yadi*, thinking that we alone are responsible for our success. We need to abstain from work for a year to remind ourselves that while we take human initiative, it is Hashem who is ultimately responsible for our success.

We are not farmers and I imagine most of us are not taking sabbaticals from our jobs next year. However, we too can and should dedicate ourselves in the coming year to working on our *emunah* in *Hashem Yisborach*, to learn to see Him as our best friend, to lean on His shoulder, reach out to Him for support, turn to Him for success and solutions and to live with deep faith.

When I think about what Opa lived through and, nevertheless, how much *emunah* he had, or, for that matter, the *emunah* that emanates from the Sha'er family I met with a few weeks ago or Esther Wachshman who was here last Shabbos, I can't help but feel admiration and awe. It is amazing to me that the people who understandably should give up on God feel closer to Him, and those whose challenges are much less, quickly give up. In our generation we are almost at the point of – I stubbed my toe, there is no God, or my internet connection is so slow, I don't believe God exists.

Eminah, faith, is not an emotion. It is a choice, it is a lifestyle, it is a life and it becomes a legacy.

Eminah demands that we not work on the sabbatical year like the farmer and not work on Shabbos like Opa. *Ha'chaim v'hamaves nasati lefanecha*, death and life are before you, but what's at stake is not only your relationship with God. Our choices have implications for generations to come. Please God we will never be tested like Yocheved's grandfather, the Sha'ers or the Wachsmans. But, if we want *l'maan tichye ata v'zaracha*, for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to live passionately Jewish lives, it

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begins with our choosing passionate lives of *emunah*, faith and gratitude ourselves. We will face hardship. How we react is our choice. *U'bacharta ba'chayim* - Choose life!

**“Hashem Has Answered Our Prayers”
Rosh Hashana Night 2014**

This year, our prayer for Rosh Hashana night was actually answered on erev Rosh Hashana: *“Yehi ratzon milfanecha Hashem Elokeinu v'Elokei Avoseinu she'yistalku oyveinu...May it be Your Will Hashem to eradicate our enemies.”*

In an interview after 9/11, General Norman Schwartzkof was asked if he thought there was room for forgiveness toward the people who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks on America. His answer...“I believe that forgiving them is God's function. Our job is simply to arrange the meeting.”

The brave soldiers of the IDF have successfully arranged the meeting between God and Amar Abu-Eisha and Marwan Kawasmeh, *yemach shemam v'zichram*, the murderers of Naftali Frenkel, Gil-Ad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrach. As of Erev Rosh Hashana, these wicked men have been eliminated, they are no longer.

The *gemara* tells us *simana milsa* – symbols on Rosh Hashana night, matter. They make a difference. We therefore dip apple in honey (though there is no mention of this in the *gemara*), and eat dates, pomegranates, fish heads, etc. We don't really believe that we can speak *lashon ha'rah* the whole meal but as long as we ate some pomegranates we are still good. The foods are *simanim* (symbols), not *sabot* (explanations). They are reminders for us to pray, not causes for good fortune.

If you want to know what was on the minds of Jews throughout our history and what was on their minds on Rosh Hashana night, just look at the dominant theme in the *simanim* at the Rosh Hashana table.

She'yikarsu soneinu, she'yistalku oyveinu, she'yitamu shoneinu. We eat foods whose names sound similar to these wishes and we pray that Hashem eliminate, eradicate and obliterate our enemies.

My dear friend and colleague, Rabbi Shalom Baum, pointed out that for many years we sat at the table with a *Yehi Ratzon*, a hope, a wish and a prayer. As we reflect back on this year, we should do so with *hakaras ha'tov*, gratitude for Hashem having answered our *yehi ratzons* of last year on Erev Rosh Hashana.

Yes, we paid a heavy price. When you look at the pictures of the young, handsome, pure faces of the innocent soldiers and civilians who died as a result of our enemies this year, you cannot help but shed many tears. They and their families never dreamt last Rosh Hashana when they said *mi yichyeh u'mi yamus* that they would no longer be here this Rosh Hashana.

But our people are resilient, strong and Hashem has blessed us with the capacity to defend ourselves and defeat our enemies. In response to the killing of the terrorists, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said that he "hopes the killing will ease the families'

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pain: "Let all those who plan to hurt Israeli citizens know that Israel will not rest, we will reach everyone who threatens us and our citizens." IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz also commented on the killing saying, "On the eve of Rosh HaShana - Operation Brother's Keeper, which began on June 13th, has ended. We promised the Sha'er, Frenkel and Yifrah families we would get the murders of their sons, and this morning we did it."

In Rabbi Baum's words - the *yehi ratzon* became the *ratzon* and for that we must be extremely grateful to Hashem and to his agents!

Shmuel Cohen, the grandfather of Gil-Ad Shaer said that, "On a personal level, I never bothered with revenge. I wouldn't risk even a small fingernail of a soldier for revenge." Cohen added that, "As a Jew and resident of Israel, this has a lot of meaning. The world needs to know that Jewish blood isn't abandoned and whoever harms a Jew has his blood on his own hands. Many thanks to those who put their lives in danger for this goal." *Dam yehudi eyno hefker.*

As we look to the year ahead, I want to wish each and every one of you a *shana tova u'mesuka*, a good and sweet year. When the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l would hand out *lekach*, honey cake, he would offer that greeting to each of his chassidim. One chasid once stopped and asked the Rebbe, why *mesuka* if it is *tova*? The Rebbe explained, because everything Hashem does is good but from our perspective it can sometimes be bitter and other times sweet.

Our wish for one another on Rosh Hashana is that what Hashem determines is good for us, is also sweet for us from our perspective. As we look at the pictures of the victims of our enemies since last Rosh Hashana, may it awaken within us genuine pleas to the Almighty to bring our brothers and sisters in Israel peace, and indeed to bring peace to the whole world.

We express gratitude to *Hashem Yisborach* for the kindness He has shown us and His people, and we ask Him in the year ahead to give us only a *shana tova u'mesuka*. May our *yehi ratzons* tonight become *Hashem's ratzon* in the coming year.

**“Transcending our Predispositions and Predilections By Choosing Who To Be”
Rosh Hashana 2014**

Dr. James Fallon, a forensic psychiatrist, is one of the world’s experts on reading brain scans. Advancements in neuroscience have led to our ability to identify various parts of the brain that are responsible for specific emotions, behavior and choices. Fallon’s understanding of neuroanatomy allows him the ability to use brain imaging to diagnose brain dysfunction in disorders such as schizophrenia, psychopathy and even depression. Fallon has traveled extensively to testify on behalf of serial killers at their sentencing and to explain that their actions were not really the result of a choice, as much as their brain being wired for them to kill.

In 2005, Fallon decided to study brain scans related to Alzheimer’s disease beginning with scans belonging to his own family. One afternoon in October of that year he was looking through a pile of his family’s brain scans when he saw something terribly startling. One of the scans read like the brain of a psychopath. There was very low activity in the areas of the frontal and temporal lobes linked to empathy, morality and self-control. He was terribly upset to see this scan among the members of his family so he checked his PET machine for an error but found it to be in perfect working order. He then challenged his research assistant, accusing him of mixing up the pile of scans on his desk.

The assistant was insistent that there was no mistake and that the scan Fallon was so disturbed by indeed belonged to a member of Fallon’s family. Fallon was alarmed and worried. He felt that he needed to un-blind the scan and identify the person whose brain showed these signs. After all, this individual was predisposed to malevolence. What if this person were to harm or even murder an innocent victim? This person needed to be stopped before they could act. Fallon looked up the code for the scan and what he found was beyond unsettling.

Darish Rebbe Chanina bar Pappa, oso Malach hamemuneh al ha’heirayon layla shmo v’noteil tipa uma’amida lifnei Hakadosh Baruch Hu v’omeir lefanav, Ribono Shel Olam, tipa zu, mah t’hei aleha? Gibbor oh chalash? Chacham oh tipeish? Ashir oh ani?

At the time of conception an angel appointed to oversee pregnancy brings the seed of pregnancy before God who decrees the physical strength, wisdom, and socioeconomic status, the artistic ability and athleticism, the creativity and psychological profile that this future person will have.

This observation of the Talmud resonates deeply for many of us. After years of resistance, countless attempts to change and adjust different aspects of our lives or personalities, many of us feel powerless, hopeless. We feel utterly wired towards certain behavior. Some of us are predisposed to be lazy, others to be quick to anger, yet others to lack self-discipline. Some of us are prone to be loud mouths, others to be emotionally closed, some to be underachievers and others to be ruthlessly ambitious.

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The Talmud just confirms what some of us have suspected our whole lives. That seed, presented before the Almighty before we ever came into the world, was programmed and wired in a way that would determine our lives leaving us feeling utterly helpless to change in a lasting and sustained way. As we sit here on the day of change, the holiday of promises to be different, many of us can't help but feel, maybe we should stop fighting who we were predetermined to be and just accept who we are with all of our deficiencies, shortcomings, failings and flaws.

Maybe, but only if the *gemara* had stopped there. However, it continues. *V'ilu rasha oh tzadik lo ka'amkar k'drebbe Chanina d'amar ha'kol biydei shomayim chutz miyiras shamayim*. Yes, through genetics and environment God has preprogrammed much of our health, our intelligence, our abilities, our appearance. However, notes the *gemara*, the angel does not inquire about perhaps the most important component of this new person's future. The angel does not ask will they be righteous or wicked, will they be good or be bad. This is in accordance with the statement of Rebbi Chanina, who says that *everything* is in the hands of Hashem, everything except *yir'as shamayim*, the spirituality and righteousness of the person.

When Dr. James Fallon un-blinded the brain scan he was greeted by an incredibly unsettling revelation. The psychopathic brain pictured in the scan was none other than his own. The man who had dedicated his life and career towards the notion that psychopaths are wired that way and are not accountable for their behavior discovered that, in fact, he was wired to kill and, yet, he hadn't.

Most of us would immediately hide such a discovery, not tell a soul and carry on. But, perhaps because psychopaths are wired to lack inhibition, Fallon went in the opposite direction. He published a book called "The Psychopath Inside" in which he seeks to reconcile how a happily married family man, an accomplished scientist such as he, could demonstrate the same anatomical markings of serial killers.

At first he thought that maybe his original hypothesis was wrong and that you can't tell from brain scans how people are predisposed to behave. So he underwent a series of genetic tests and it went from bad to worse. The tests showed a variant of the MAO-A gene linked with aggression, violence and low empathy. He took further neurological and behavioral tests, all of which confirmed that, indeed, he is a certifiable psychopath.

When he reflected on his life, he began to realize that he, in fact, has some psychopathic behavior. He is obnoxiously competitive, not even letting his grandchildren win board games. He can be verbally aggressive and offensive and come on strong without realizing it. Yet, with all of his predisposition and being wired as a psychopath, he has never killed, never raped and never been violent.

He was haunted by the question, why? Why has he been able to temper his behavior while others with the same genetics and brain end up in prison? Fallon gives a few answers. Firstly, he suggests, he was incredibly loved and nurtured as a child and that contributed tremendously to shaping him. His mother had a series of miscarriages before

having him and gave him a large amount of attention in his younger years. He believes that played a large role.

But much more significantly, Fallon boils down his ability to overcome his predisposition and genetic bias to two words – free will. He used to believe that people were roughly 80 percent the result of genetics, and 20 percent the result of their environment, but that has now changed. “Since finding all this out and looking into it, I’ve made an effort to try to change my behavior.”

The Rambam begins Hilchos Dei’os by stating that we all have personality traits we are born with and significant predispositions. *V’chol ha’deios yeish mei’hem dei’os she’hein l’adam m’tchilas beriyaso l’fi teva gufo, v’yeish mei’hein dei’os she’tiv’o shel adom zeh mechuvan*, etc. For instance, he writes, some people are by nature cruel and others merciful, some by nature are arrogant and some are modest.

Yet in the fifth perek of Hilchos Teshuvah, the Rambam is emphatic that a person's nature does not cause him to be righteous or wicked, kind or cruel, wise or foolish, generous or miserly. *“Al yaavor b’machshavscha davar zeh she’omrim tipsei umos ha’olam v’rov golmei bnei Yisroel she’Hakadosh Baruch Hu gozeir al ha’adam metichlas beriyaso liheyos tzadik or rasha...”*

So which is it, are we preprogrammed, predisposed, are our lives predetermined, or do we have free will?

I read an [interview](#) with Fallon where he said the following: “After all of this research, I started to think of this experience as an opportunity to do something good out of being kind of a jerk my entire life. Instead of trying to fundamentally change—because it’s very difficult to change anything—I wanted to use what could be considered faults, like narcissism, to an advantage; to do something good.”

The Rambam is not contradicting himself. The answer, I believe is that we most certainly are born with predispositions and predilections. Our genetics play an enormous role in shaping who we are and the lives we will lead. However, our genetics just provide the boundaries of our limitations. They give the parameters of our intellect, our bodies and even, to a degree, our souls. Our genetics deal us a set of cards. However, it remains up to us how to play those cards and that is the most important factor in determining our future.

None of our attributes or qualities are inherently bad. They are neutral, and it is up to us to endow them with value based on how we use them. The Gemara in Shabbos 156a states that a person’s nature is greatly influenced by his or her astrological sign. R. Chanina says, for example, an individual born during the hour when Mars is “dominant” is destined to spill blood. R. Ashi interjects that this does not necessarily mean that he will be a murderer. If he wishes, he can channel his natural tendency for spilling blood for productive purposes and can choose a career as a surgeon, *shochet*, or *mohel*.

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Our character traits are to a large degree predetermined, but how they are controlled, what we dedicate them towards, how we use them and towards what end is entirely up to us and our free will.

In discussing the various barriers and obstacles to *teshuva*, to change, Rabbeinu Yonah suggests that perhaps the greatest barrier is a lack of optimism, a failure to believe in our capacity to change.

My friends, my message to you today, Rosh Hashana, the beginning of a New Year and a fresh start, is that we absolutely can change if we want to. Yes, we have predispositions, and yes, we have predilections, but they don't have to define us. We can do whatever we want with them. We can overcome the negativity within what we see as our faults and channel those same qualities towards positive outcomes. However, it begins with believing in our ability to do so.

In the interview with Fallon, he explains how he has changed his life and made a huge difference to his family and friends: "...Every time I started to do something, I had to think about it, look at it, and go: *No. Don't do the selfish thing or the self-serving thing.* Step-by-step, that's what I've been doing for about a year and a half and they all like it."

The Sefer Tiferes Ha'Yehudi by the Yid Ha'Kadosh tells the story of Rav Chaim Krasner, a Chassidishe Rebbe, who went with his followers to visit an acrobat in the town of Krasny. The acrobat was scheduled to balance himself on a very high tightrope and walk across a river in the town.

Like the rest of the townsfolk, the Rebbi appeared to be fascinated and stared with great intensity as the man made his way across the river. The crowd was gaping below. When the tightrope walker was finished, the Hassidim asked their teacher, "Rebbe, why was this so interesting to you?" And Reb Chaim responded, "You might think that the acrobat crossed the river because of the financial reward offered to the person who would do it. And indeed he might have started with that motivation. But once he was up on the tightrope, if he had thought about that reward for even an instant, if he concentrated on the destination, he would have fallen. While he was on the tightrope, the only thing he could think about was the next step and then the step after that until he got to the other side."

Step-by-step, little by little, is how Fallon describes his positive changes and it is exactly how we can make our own. That is what today is all about. Take that first step and then go slowly, incrementally, step-by-step after that, like the acrobat who can't afford to look too far ahead and cares only about the next step.

Recognize that nobody is condemned by his or her genetics. That is critically important for ourselves, for our relationships, and for the way we parent our children.

We can channel whoever we are and however we are programmed to do good, to be good, to feel good, and to have good. Recently, there was a troublemaker in our

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community who seemed to be picking fights with everybody. I met with him together with our past president with the expectation we would ban him from our campus, but I learned something incredible that day. Our past president didn't look to throw him out. He turned to the man and said, "It seems to me that you love to fight. You get some kind of high from being confrontational. That's great. We need fighters. We need you to fight on behalf of *agunas*, to fight against Iran, to fight injustice."

We can take whatever we are predisposed towards and use it for good. If you tend to indulge, great. Indulge in chesed and be insatiable. If you have a fire in your belly, don't scream and rant in anger. Be a passionate leader of a worthwhile cause. If you are a narcissist like Fallon, use the need for attention to motivate you towards positive behavior that is worthy of attention.

Take advantage of this Rosh Hashana. *Shana* means year, but my friend Rabbi Daniel Lerner pointed out that it also means *shoneh*, to change. So much change has happened to us. Our world is radically changed this year from the past. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us have lost money. And some of us have lost our hair.

On this Rosh Hashana, let's not just allow change to happen to us. Let's be the catalyst for change. Let's usher in Rosh Hashana, a new beginning, and Rosh Ha'Shoneh, the beginning of a new attitude, from powerlessness and hopelessness to fortitude and determination.

**“The Only Thing That is Truly Frail”
Yom Kippur 2014**

There once was a court jester who was known throughout the kingdom to be a smart, clever, and funny man. He had a knack for choosing the right jokes at the right time and was one of the only people who could make the king laugh. One day, however, the jester went too far and insulted the king in such a way that the joke was seen to have treasonous intent and was, therefore, punishable by death. The king, feeling compassion for the jester, told him that he could choose the way he would die. Many people, without thinking, would have chosen a quick and painless death. The jester, however, had been practicing making choices his entire life. He paused to think for a moment and replied, “I choose death by old age.”

Death by old age...the question is how do you define old. “*Y’mei shnoseinu vahem shivim shana v’im b’gevuros shemonim shana*, The days of our years are seventy, and if we are strong eighty.” According to Dovid Ha’Melech or at least Moshe Rabbeinu who wrote this particular *kapitel*, the people of Florida must be strong because the average life expectancy in our state is 79.4 years.

Seventy-nine and a half is a good life, but still too short as far as most of us are concerned. Most of us, but not all of us. One of those who disagree is Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, director of the Clinical Bioethics Department at the NIH, and department head of Medical Ethics and Health Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. He says that he wants to die. Not right now, but in 18 years from now, when he is 75.

In a recent essay in *The Atlantic*, “[Why I want to die at 75](#),” the 57-year-old wrote “By the time I reach 75, I will have lived a complete life...I will have loved and been loved. My children will be grown and in the midst of their own rich lives. I will have seen my grandchildren born and beginning their lives. I will have pursued my life's projects and made whatever contributions, important or not, I am going to make. And hopefully, I will not have too many mental and physical limitations.”

Dr. Emanuel is clear that he is not arguing for euthanasia or advocating patient-assisted suicide. His goal is to call attention to “a simple truth that many of us seem to resist: living too long is also a loss. It renders many of us, if not disabled, then faltering and declining.” He continues by saying that in their older years, seniors contribute less to the world, take much more from the world, the costs are great to keep them alive and ultimately their deaths are drawn out and more painful than necessary. Because of all these factors, Dr. Emanuel doesn’t just accept death, he invites it and asks for it to come and get him when he is exactly 75 years old, before he becomes frail and infirm.

“*V’lakach es sh’nei ha’s’irim v’heemid osam lifnei Hashem pesach ohel mo’eid*...The Kohen Gadol takes the two goats and stands them before Hashem. *V’nasan Aharon al shnei ha’s’irim goralos, goral echad l’Hashem v’goral echad L’azazel*. Aharon places lots upon the two goats and says, one lot is for Hashem and the other is designated l’Azazel.”

The centerpiece of the avodah, the service of Yom Kippur, is the story of the two goats that looked identical, but had very different fates. A lottery was drawn designating one goat to be offered as a sacrifice to God while the other was named "Azazel" and pushed off of a cliff.

Why was it called Azazel? The Ibn Ezra and Ramban both reference the Gemara in Yoma 67b - "*Tana d'bei Rebbe Yishmoel Azazel sh'mechapeir al ma'aseh Uzza v'Azael*. The school of Rabbi Ishmael explained it is called Azazel because it atones for the acts of the fallen angels, Uzza and Azael."

Who are these angels and what happened with them? The Zohar (Parshas Balak) fills us in:

When God created the world, nobody objected to the introduction of the trees, the cows, the clouds, the oceans, etc., until God created man. Then the Angels staunchly objected and said, *Mah enosh ki sizkerenu*, What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? (Tehillim 8:5). Man is frail, fallible, and imperfect; why is he worthy of your creation and attention when he is unworthy?

Yet God created man nonetheless. When man made a mistake and obtained a pardon, the two Angels that had objected, Uzza and Azael, approached Hashem and said: We were right, as the man You made has failed You. Hashem said to them, "Had you been with them you would have sinned equally." And He cast them down from their high estate in heaven unto the earth.

Where did they go? Says the Izbitcher Rebbe in his Beis Yaakov, they went into each one of us. Their voice that argues *Mah enosh ki sizkerenu*, what is man that you remember him, can be found in our heads. That attitude of "you are frail, infirm, fragile and fallible and therefore unworthy and insignificant" haunts us.

Says the Izbitcher - on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the time designated for a fresh start and a new beginning, we push the voice of Azazel off a cliff.

This philosophy of the Angel Azael has crept into our psyche, it rings in our ears. It tells each one of us you are imperfect, you have shortcomings and deficiencies, you aren't the smartest, you are not the best-looking, the most creative, or most successful. You are unworthy and insignificant and your life is inconsequential. You don't matter. Says the Izbitcher - "*V'hinei zeh ha'koach tzafun b'leiv ha'adam she m'katreig al haviyaso u'memeila zeh ha'koach yirzeh l'havi es ha'adam l'avdon v'sohu...*"

That voice is the root of our mistakes and indiscretions. We feel our lives lack significance and true value so why bother striving for righteousness, why not indulge in negative, self-destructive behavior. Before pushing the goat of Azazel off the cliff the Kohen leans on it and confesses, "You, you Azazel, you the voice inside me of

negativity, of unworthiness, and of insignificance, you are responsible for my giving up on myself, for my not trying to be better. You must go.” He then pushes it away.

“Frailty is the ultimate tragedy,” writes Dr. Emanuel, and he therefore wants to die at 75, before he becomes frail.

“Frailty is the ultimate tragedy.” Is it? Here is the thing - you don’t have to be over 75 years old to be frail. We are all frail in some capacity. Many people significantly younger than 75, are emotionally frail, struggling with ADD, OCD, anxiety disorder or depression. In Dr. Emanuel’s view, are their lives tragic? Would it be better for them not to be here? Others, significantly younger than 75, are physically frail, struggling with maladies, infirmities, ailments, and physical disabilities. Are their lives tragedies? Do they not matter? Others much younger than 75 are spiritually frail struggling with doubts, uncertainties, crises of faith and difficulty connecting. Are their lives tragic? Would Dr. Emanuel prefer them to not be here?

Frailty is not a function of age and it is not a function of condition. It is a function of mindset. Being incapacitated, limited in speech, vision, or functionality, is not frail. Do you know what is frail? Seeing those limitations as synonymous with insignificance and therefore seeing those with emotional, physical or spiritual limitations as having tragic lives, that is frail and moreover it is the voice of Azazel. That is the voice in our heads that we silence not only today, but pledge to silence every day going forward.

Having limitations of any kind and at any age does not equate to insignificance. The world has been influenced in tremendous ways, for good and for bad, by some people with what Dr. Emanuel would call the greatest frailties and limitations.

Consider the impact of a blind quadriplegic man named Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Hassan Yassin. He was the founder of Hamas, the organization and movement responsible for launching thousands and thousands of rockets at Israel and for the murder of many Jews. In 2004, while he was being wheeled out of an early-morning prayer session in Gaza City, an Israeli helicopter fired missiles at him and his bodyguards killing them. Israel was condemned for attacking a “frail” person. Israel’s correct response was that a person is not “frail” when he can found and build an organization and network that terrorizes the world, no matter what his physical limitations.

Consider on the other hand the story of [Dr. Rahamim Melamed-Cohen](#), as told by Sara Yoheved Rigler. At the age of 57, he had everything going for him. He was handsome, athletic, happily married, the father of six children, and successful in his career. He was a Ph.D. in Special Education and held a leading position in Israel's Ministry of Education.

Then one day, he felt a weakness in his left shoulder. Soon the weakness spread down his arm to his fingers. When he made Kiddush on Shabbat night, the Kiddush cup shook and the wine spilled. He and his wife Elisheva made the rounds of neurologists, until one doctor gave them the diagnosis: ALS, also known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease."

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The doctor spelled out for them the entire course of the disease: first his limbs would become paralyzed, to be followed by the muscles of his neck, esophagus, and tongue. He would ultimately become dependent on other people for everything. And in the final stage, his lungs would stop working. He was bluntly told, "You have three to five years to live."

Fifteen years later he was still going strong. Three of the doctors who treated him died in that time. Since the onset of his illness, he has written nine books, the latest by means of a computer that types by his eye movements. Until a year ago, when he could still speak clearly, he gave lectures on educational methodology to students in his living room. He maintains a voluminous email correspondence with readers who look to him for encouragement and wisdom. He prays three times daily and attends synagogue every Shabbat. And he and his wife go out regularly, to the theater, to weddings, and to restaurants, although Rahamim himself no longer eats except through a feeding tube to his stomach. As Elisheva explains, "Although he doesn't eat, he sits with us." His company is obviously worth the effort.

A segment of the film, "Heroes Against Their Will," shows Dr. Melamed-Cohen debating Dr. Noam Reches, the chairman of the Israel Medical Ethics Committee and a leading proponent of euthanasia, who himself has "pulled the plug" on request. Dr. Reches looks at the wheelchair-bound Dr. Melamed-Cohen, with the respirator tube connected to the tracheotomy in his neck, and says, "You can't feed yourself. You can't hug the people you love... If I were in your position, I'd want out."

Dr. Melamed-Cohen responds, "These are the most beautiful and happiest years of my life." "Some other ALS patients when they were fully conscious asked to end their lives," Dr. Reches continues. "They didn't want to reach your situation of complete dependence on others." Dr. Melamed-Cohen gazes at Dr. Reches and declares, "Believe me, my life is no less interesting than yours."

Over Yom Kippur we recite the *viduy*, the litany of *al chets* over and over again. God, forgive me for doing this wrong and that wrong and the other thing wrong. We say the same list each year with the promise we will become better, but we don't, and we find ourselves back saying it again.

It can be quite debilitating and depressing to realize the extent of our frailty and fallibility. Why engage in such a disheartening practice? Explains the Izbiter, when we *klop* the *al chet*, when we recite the *viduy* and list the mistakes we have made, we do so not to conclude "I am frail and therefore insignificant," but exactly the opposite. We acknowledge the mistakes, bad judgment and indiscretions to remind ourselves that we **are** significant, that they **do** matter, that in fact, no matter our limitations and frailties, **we** matter.

Now to be clear, I understand where Dr. Emanuel is coming from. There are illnesses and conditions that are severely painful for the patients and their families. Seeing a loved one suffer, experiencing his or her fading memory and failing faculties can be excruciatingly

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painful. Halacha acknowledges and recognizes circumstances where it is even permissible to pray for God to have compassion and take someone to the other world expeditiously. Halacha also recognizes and in fact encourages us to prepare halachic health care proxies and specify our wishes for how we are treated in end of life situations.

However, *al tashlicheinu l'eis zikna*, Dr. Emmanuel. Halacha and Judaism categorically reject the idea of inviting death while yet healthy because supposedly “frailty is the ultimate tragedy.” As Dr. Melamed-Cohen taught us in the extreme, our frailties need not lead to a life of tragedy, but with our psychological, emotional or spiritual “frailties” we can live lives of meaning, purpose, joy and love.

Mi ha'ish ha'chafetz chaim? We usually understand that Dovid Ha'Melech is teaching us, who truly values life, *n'tzor l'shoncha mei rah*, the one who watches how they speak. However, I would like to suggest to you that the answer to *mi ha'ish ha'chafetz chaim* is in fact the very next words, *ohav yamim lir'os tov*. Who wants life? The one who loves every day and sees the good in it.

In Chevron, in Ma'arat Ha'Machpeila the other night, there was a special selichos that was introduced by words from the fathers of the three boys who were kidnapped and killed. Ofir Sha'er, Gilad's father, described how difficult it was to daven on Rosh Hashana this year. In previous years, he said, he concentrated on *parnasah* and other material concerns. However this year, the year in which his son was brutally murdered, as he made his way through the *machzor*, there was a word that kept jumping out at him – *chaim* – life. All he could think about, and all we should think about, is the value of every moment of life and how we can live each of them to our fullest.

All too often, we live our lives focused on all the things we cannot do because of what we lack. We emphasize our frailties and gloss over our strengths. We think about everything we are *not* and fail to consider who we *are* and who we could be. Our tradition is clear: *bishvili nivrah olam*, for me alone it was worth God creating the world. God does not make mistakes. No one is non-essential in this world. If you are here, if you are breathing – it is because God wants you to be here. If you are alive, it is because you have a mission and a purpose that can be fulfilled only by YOU!

And that's why we say *Zachreinu l'chaim, melech chafetz ba'chaim*, remember us Hashem and help us not invite death, but rather commit ourselves to live life no matter our personal limitations, challenges and shortcomings. Let us never feel *mah enosh ki sizkerenu*, what is man that You remember him, but rather, let us recognize our significance and the significance of our contributions at any age, in any condition, and with any limitations, because in truth, *bishvili nivrah olam*, for me alone it was worth God creating the world.

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