

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

**A**lthough he wasn't speaking about Yom Ha'atzmaut directly, one of the themes important in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's theology sheds light on what Israel's Independence Day means to modern Jewry.

During that historic Passover of 1949, the first year we were actually living in our own State of Israel, one paragraph in the Haggadah must have especially resonated with remarkable and particular poignancy: "The Covenant has stood by our ancestors and us; in every generation there are those who stand up against us to destroy us, but the Holy One Blessed be He saves us from their hands..."

In his essay, Kol Dodi Dofek ("The Voice of My Beloved Knocks") Rabbi Soloveitchik speaks of the two covenants in which G-d enters with the Jewish people: the covenant of coercion and the covenant of choice.

The first covenant, commonly called the "Pact Between Halves" (Genesis 15), is with Abraham: overwhelmed with the fear that his only heir will be Eliezer, his Damascan servant, G-d reassures him that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, again promising the land of Israel as his possession. When Abraham wants reassurance, G-d commands that he bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove and a young pigeon; the animals, except for the birds, are then split in half, the blood of both halves mingling together. Abraham then falls into a deep trance-like sleep, struck by a great black dread, whereupon it is revealed to him that his descendants will be slaves in Egypt. When he is resuscitated, a smoking furnace and a flaming torch miraculously pass between the 'halves'; symbolizing the Divine Presence and Abraham united by the common blood, as it were, G-d then declares, "To your descendants I have given this land from the Egyptian river, as far as the great river of the Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18).

Although Abraham has no children when this promise is made, the guarantee of descendants means there will always be Jews, despite the ravages of history, destructions, exiles and persecutions. Indeed, even if we fall pray to assimilation, if we forget we are Jews, G-d will send an anti-Semitic leader who will remind us that we are Jews, forcing us, as it were, to remain part of the covenant as an eternal people. This,

says Rav Soloveitchik, is the covenant of coercion, which Rabbi Soloveitchik calls a covenant of fate. When you're born a Jew, that's your fate. You had no choice in the matter, and, to a great extent, your Jewishness is imposed from without. Even the most indifferent and apathetic Jews were sent to Auschwitz!

The second covenant is the covenant of choice, and it takes place at Sinai, in Parshat Mishpatim, the portion dealing with civil legislation. After Moses writes down all the words of the Ten Commandments and receives divine instruction, he builds an altar at the foot of the mountain, and he and the young men offer oxen as burnt offerings to G-d. Moses takes half the blood and places it into large bowls, and the rest he sprinkles on the altar. "He took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; they responded 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will obey' " (Exodus 24:7).

Here, too, there is the blood of covenant. However, at Sinai the Jews are not coerced into accepting the Torah. Instead, they voluntarily take it upon themselves, crying out with one voice, 'We will do and we will obey,' meaning that we will not be Jews merely because we were born Jews, or because the Gentile world defines us as Jews. At Sinai we chose, freely and openly, to accept a binding system of morality, to adapt a unique lifestyle, to strive to become a Kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation. At Sinai, Israel turned her fate (what she was born into) into destiny (what she willed herself to be).

We find both of these covenants evident in two of Judaism's major rites of passage: circumcision and the bar or bat mitzvah. The first is foisted on the child when he's eight days old. It's the choice of the parent, "cut" into the very organ of propagation of the child, foisted upon him as a fateful birth-obligation. The symbol of this covenant is blood and pain. In his major novel, *The Assistant*, Bernard Malamud describes and defines the Jews essentially on the basis of this covenant of suffering. A Jew is a Jew because he suffers, and although his suffering will often ennoble those fated to endure it, as Malamud's most successfully drawn characters demonstrate, it's not necessarily a suffering of one's own choosing.

The second important rite of passage occurs on a girl's 12th or a boy's 13th birthday, when for the first time a young woman or man publicly declares before the congregation of Israel that he/she is now

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part of the Jewish people, accepting privileges and obligations, the 'we will do and we will obey' part of the Sinai covenant, the destiny of being a light unto the nations, witnesses of a G-d of love and peace, partners with the Divine in bringing about world redemption.

The Holocaust, a six-year-long circumcision of pain and blood, is the most vivid expression of the covenant of fate. And with Yom HaAtzmaut, the declaration of Israel's independence as a unique nation among the nations of the world, we turned our fate into destiny, we took back our existential decisions from the hands of the Gentiles into our own hands as a free nation, and re-joined the annals of history. If we will only accept the prophets of our Bible as our guides, we can legitimately reach not only for survival but for redemption, and the next sixty years may well usher in a world "where nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore."

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#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**P**arashas Emor begins by teaching the kohanim, the priests, restrictions that are the result of their extra level of holiness, such as avoiding contact with a corpse. Included in these restrictions are not pulling out their hair (over the loss of a loved one), not shaving the "corners of their beard," and not making gashes in their skin (Vayikra 21:5). However, these prohibitions apply to every Jew, not just to kohanim; the latter two are included in last week's Parasha (19:27-28), while the first one is taught in Parashas Re'ay (Devarim 14:1). Why, if they apply to every Jew, are they directed separately to the kohanim? Wouldn't it have been enough to just teach it once, to everyone?

Rashi raises this question, and answers that there are details included when these prohibitions are taught to the kohanim that are not included in the general prohibition, and details included in the prohibition directed to the entire nation that were not taught to the kohanim. Therefore, both are taught so that, between the two, we can learn out every detail. Nevertheless, all of the details could have been included in the general prohibitions, thereby eliminating the need to incorporate these prohibitions with those that only apply to kohanim. Why did the Torah teach

only some details in each location, necessitating that these laws be taught twice in order to get all the details?

The Talmud (Gittin 60a) tells us that eight sections of the Torah were said on the day that the Mishkan was erected, the first of which was "the section regarding the kohanim." Rashi (d"h Parashas Kohanim) tells us that this refers to the beginning of our Parasha, as the kohanim were about to start their service and needed to know the prohibitions relevant to their new status. Even though Parashas Kedoshim, where laws that stemmed from the entire nation being holy are taught, appears in the Torah before Parashas Emor, it was actually taught after the laws taught at the beginning of Parashas Emor (see Rashi, d"h Ee Nami Lechiderebi Levi). All of Sefer Deverim, including the prohibition against any Jew pulling out his hair after a loved one passes away, was taught much later, i.e. right before Moshe died. And, like the other two prohibitions under discussion, it stems from the special relationship the Jewish nation has with the Creator (because we are "His sons"). Armed with this information, we can try to reconstruct what happened that caused the Torah to teach us these prohibitions specifically for the kohanim despite needing to be subsequently repeated to everyone.

The Mishkan was dedicated in Nissan 2449 (almost a year after the exodus from Egypt). Because the kohanim, Aaron and his sons, were about to start their role performing the service in the Mishkan, G-d has to teach them about their new status, and what it entails. Even though it would be inappropriate for them to commit any transgression, especially when performing the service, those things that directly relate to their holiness are included—even if they will need to be subsequently taught to the entire nation. So G-d tells Moshe to include these three prohibitions among the prohibitions that only apply to kohanim. Eventually, Moshe teaches the entire nation all of the laws, including these three. When dictating the Torah to Moshe, G-d has two choices. Either include all of the prohibitions that were originally included in "Parashas Kohanim" and then repeat those prohibitions relevant to the entire nation, or include all of the details in the sections that are directed at everyone and omit them completely when dictating "Parashas Kohanim." Because the wording in "Parashas Kohanim" as originally taught did not include all the details (even if Moshe explained them orally to the kohanim), G-d included "Parashas Kohanim" in the Torah exactly as it was originally taught, and filled in the rest of the details when necessarily repeating the prohibitions to the rest of the nation.

Had the general prohibitions preceded the ones directed to the kohanim, they would not have needed to be repeated to the kohanim; all the details could have been taught in that one place. However, since these

laws had to be taught to the kohanim in Nissan 2449, and not all of the details were included, G-d left "Parashas Kohanim" intact and taught the remaining details when He informed the nation that these prohibitions applied to everyone else as well. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**hen our oldest daughter Dena was wed to Mark, I found myself in deep thought. A dear friend came by and said, "Loosen up Avi. Enjoy it. You'll have time to think later."

This exchange helps to shed light on the mandate in this week's portion to count 49 days between Passover and Shavuot. (Leviticus 23:15) Sefer Ha-Hinukh asks why we begin the count from the second day and not the first day of Passover.

The way Jewish ritual approaches celebratory and tragic moments in life may reveal the answer. Consider the painful experience of death. Halakha insists the bereaved be able to become totally involved in the tragedy to the extent that family members are relieved from performing affirmative commandments between death and burial. Only after burial does the period of Shivah, of deep reflection set in.

Similarly, in moments of joy. When leaving Egypt, Am Yisrael was immersed in the euphoria of the Exodus. Only following that euphoria, which manifests itself through the Passover Seder, do we begin counting towards the receiving of the Torah-the event that gives meaning and purpose to the Exodus. Jewish law allows for the full experiencing of the event. Only then does it ask for separate distinct moments of evaluation.

My son Dov noted that there is psychological benefit to this principle. After all, when something of import occurs, we should be encouraged to feel deeply and wholly what is happening. We should literally be in the moment. Only afterwards, from a distance, can we step back and with clarity, contemplate the significance of the event and begin to put it in perspective.

Not coincidentally, this portion is read between Israel Independence Day and the anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem. Some erroneously suggest these days should be de-emphasized as we are in the post - Zionist era. To the contrary. These days deserve greater focus as we are, in fact, in a new, even more challenging phase within the modern Zionist period. For sixty years we ecstatically celebrated the coming into being of the State. Now begins the more reflective period of looking inward and defining what is the significance of the State to the Jewish people and the world at large.

Evaluating only after the event occurs is a lesson for all of us. And that's why we begin counting from the second day of Passover - so we can enjoy

moments when they come and then afterwards take the time to reflect and anticipate. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he beginning part of this week's parsha refers to the special laws and status regarding kohanim - the descendants of Aharon. It is common knowledge that a study based on the DNA samples of many current day kohanim revealed a common genetic strain amongst a considerable number of those who participated in the study. This strain was found to be common even amongst people who lived in different areas of the world separated by thousands of miles and centuries of differing ethnicities.

The jury is still out whether these DNA findings have any halachic validity and as to what exactly these findings prove. Over the centuries of Jewish life the kohanim have fiercely protected their lineal descent from Aharon and zealously guarded their status of legitimacy as being kohanim. Kohanim are held in high regard in the Jewish world and are entitled to certain special privileges and honors in the Jewish religious society.

Though it seems that it is permissible for a kohein to waive some of those privileges if he so wishes, preferred behavior dictates that he not do so. The status of the kohein is to be preserved as a remembrance of their special role in the Temple services in Jerusalem. But in a deeper sense it is to be preserved to remind us of their special mission "to guard with their lips knowledge and to teach Torah to those who request it."

They are to be a blessing to the people of Israel and they are commanded to in turn bless the people of Israel. Blessed are those that are commanded to bless others. Thus the status of a kohein is representative of all that is noble and positive in Jewish life and tradition - knowledge, Torah, grace, security and peace.

The question of ersatz kohanim is discussed widely in connection with halachic decisions. Not every person who claims to be a kohein is really a kohein. Since true pedigrees are very difficult to truly ascertain today, the halacha adopts a position that who is really a kohein is a matter of doubt. Therefore great rabbinic decisors, especially in the United States, have oftenm, in cases of dire circumstances, "annulled" the kehuna of an individual.

In the confusion of immigration to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries there were people who disguised themselves as kohanim in order to earn the

monies of pidyon haben - the redemption of the first born son from the kohein. These people were charlatans, but many other simple Jews assumed that somehow they were kohanim without any real proof of the matter. Even tombstones that declared that one's father was a kohein were not to be accepted as definitive proof of the matter. Therefore the DNA results are most interesting and provocative.

The halacha has not yet determined with certainty the trustworthiness of DNA results in matters that require halachic decision. Therefore it is premature to speculate whether DNA testing will ever be used as a method of determining one's true status as a kohein. But ever is a long time coming so we will have to see. Meanwhile the kohanim should retain their tradition of pedigree to the best of their abilities. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah gives us a glimpse into the kohanim's status during Mashiach's times. The prophet Yechezkel begins by directing our attention to the specific regulations of the kohanim's garb. He then refers to their restriction from wine and shaving and mentions their prohibition from marrying certain women. This list seems to be, at first glance, a total repetition of the details of our parsha. Yet, a more careful analysis reveals to us something shocking about the elevated status of the ordinary kohain of Mashiach's times. His restrictions and regulations are similar to those of the Kohain Gadol mentioned in this week's parsha. This suggests that the ordinary kohain's spiritual status will be likened to that of the Kohain Gadol. Evidently, the Jewish people's status will be so elevated that the ordinary kohain will assume levels of sanctity tantamount to the most sanctified person of earlier times.

The prophet Yechezkel conveys this message by drawing our focus to the priestly garb during their service. It will be exclusively linen rather than the customary complex woolen and golden material of earlier times. In addition, the kohanim will be forbidden to wear their garb outside the Bais Hamikdash thereby limiting all mundane association with the garb. Their hair length will be regulated and limited to that of the Kohain Gadol of earlier times- not too long, not too short. They will even be forbidden to marry widows thus limiting their marriage to virgins. (see comments of Radak, Abravenel and Malbim to these respective passages) All of these regulations run parallel lines with those of the earlier Kohain Gadol. In fact, some of them were previously prescribed for the Kohain Gadol during

his elevated Yom Kippur service. We conclude from this that the daily Temple service of Mashiach's times will assume higher levels of devotion than ever and resemble, on some level, the Yom Kippur service of earlier generations. The earlier experience of the Kohain Gadol on the holiest of all days in the holiest of all places will eventually become part of the daily service of Mashiach's times!

In order to digest this overwhelming development let us study the inner workings of the Kohain Gadol. In this week's parsha, the Torah gives us the reason for the Kohain Gadol's elevated status. After listing all his specific regulations the Torah states "And he should not leave the Mikdash and not profane the sanctity of Hashem because the crown of Hashem is upon his head." (Vayikra 21:12) Sefer HaChinuch (in Mitzva 270) elaborates upon the concept of "the crown of Hashem". He cites the opinion of the Rambam (in Hilchos Klei Hamikdash 5:7) that the Kohain Gadol was confined to the Bais Hamikdash area throughout his entire day of service. In addition, Rambam teaches us that the Kohain Gadol was forbidden to leave the holy city of Yerushalayim during nightly hours. This produced an incredible focus on Hashem and His service yielding the supreme sanctity of the Kohain Gadol. Sefer HaChinuch profoundly states, "Although the Kohain Gadol was human he was designated to be Holy of Holies. His soul ranked amongst the angels constantly cleaving to Hashem thus detaching the Kohain Gadol from all mundane interests and concerns." (ad loc) Sefer HaChinuch understands the Kohain Gadol's elevated sanctity as a product of his total immersion in the service of Hashem. His surroundings of total sanctity together with his constant focus on Hashem and His service produced the holiest man on earth. His elevated life-style was restricted to one of total sanctity because his total interest and focus were devoted to purity and sanctity.

We can now appreciate the sanctity of the ordinary kohain of Mashiach's times and its message for us. First, a word about the general status of the Jewish people during that era. The prophet Yeshaya refers to this illustrious time in the following terms, "And the land will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem likened to the water that fills the sea." (Yeshaya 11:9) Rambam elaborates upon this and states, "And in this time there will be no jealousy or quarreling... the preoccupation of all will be 'to know Hashem'...the Jewish people will be great scholars who will understand Hashem to maximum human capacity." (Hilchos M'lochim 12:5) In essence, the entire Jewish nation will be absorbed in learning Hashem's truthful ways. Their total focus will be on Hashem's expression in every aspect of life thus revealing more and more of His unlimited goodness and knowledge. It stands to reason that if this will be the knowledge of the ordinary Jew, how much greater will be that of the kohain who is

privileged to stand in the actual presence of Hashem! One cannot begin contemplating the ordinary kohain's daily experience with Hashem. His profound knowledge of Hashem together with his direct and constant association with Him will truly elevate him to the sanctity of "Holy of Holies". His awareness of Hashem's presence will therefore, in certain ways, become tantamount to that of the Kohain Gadol on the holiest day of the year. May we soon merit to witness and experience such elevated levels of sanctity, so sorely needed in our times. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## What's Bothering Rashi

**C**hapter 23 in this week's parsha discusses the festivals of the year. "Six days shall work be performed and on the seventh day it is a Sabbath of resting, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your dwelling places." (Leviticus 23:3)

"Six days"-RASHI: "What is the connection between the Sabbath and the festivals? To teach you that whoever profanes the festivals is considered as though he profaned the Sabbath and whoever keeps the festivals is considered as though he kept the Sabbaths."

In this Rashi-comment, there is no need to search for what is bothering Rashi. He says so himself when he asks "What is the connection between the Sabbath and the festivals?" This section begins with the verse "These are the appointed times of Hashem which you shall proclaim them as holy assemblies; these are My appointed times." Clearly this section is speaking of the festivals (i.e."the appointed times"), why then is the Sabbath mentioned?

Both the Sabbath and the seven festivals of the year (which are discussed further on in this Chapter 23) entail prohibitions regarding work. The Sabbath is stricter; no work (as defined by the Sages) may be done on the Sabbath. On festivals, on the other hand, preparing food is permissible. Also the punishments for the two categories differ. Sabbath desecration is punishable by death while the festival desecration is punishable with lashes. There is another difference between the Sabbath and the festivals. The Sabbath is a fixed day in the calendar-every seven days since Creation has been the Sabbath. The festivals, on the other hand, are dates in the month and these depend on the Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the month. Rosh Chodesh itself is determined by the Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem. It can be on the 30th day from the prior Rosh Chodesh or the 31st day. So, the exact day on which the festival falls out is ultimately determined each year by the Rabbinical court. That is, it is man-made, so to speak, as opposed to the Sabbath which G-d made. Now we can question Rashi's comment.

A Question: How can Rashi say "whoever profanes the festivals is considered as though he profaned the Sabbath, etc."? Certainly profaning the Sabbath is much worse than profaning the festivals, as can be seen by the different punishments. A difficult question.

An Answer: Perhaps the message is that while in fact desecration of the festival is not as severe as desecration of the Sabbath, yet it is "considered as if one profaned the Sabbath" because obeying the legal opinions of the Rabbis-in this case, observing the festival on the day the Rabbis determined-is itself G-d's will.

This is a basic and profound principle in Judaism. Basic, because it places the decisions of the Sages as central to the form and practice of Judaism. Profound because it shows that Torah observance is ultimately determined by laws created by a partnership between man and G-d.

Several times in the Talmud this is elucidated and emphasized. There is a dramatic case where (Talmud Rosh Hashanah 25a) Rabbis Yehoshua and Rabbi Gamliel disagreed as to when the new moon appeared in the Month of Tishrei (when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur fall out). Rabbi Gamliel, being the leader, the Nasi, required Rabbi Yehoshua, who was on the Beit Din of Jerusalem, to come to him with his money and his walking stick on the day that was, according to Rabbi Yehoshua, Yom Kippur. Rabbi Akiva explained to the greatly distressed Rabbi Yehoshua, that if Rabbi Gamaliel so determined it, it would be no transgression of Yom Kippur. He cited our verse to show that the Rabbi's determination decides which day is actually Yom Kippur.

The fact that observing the legal decisions of the Sages is actually G-d's will, is taught to us by another dramatic Tamudic passage in Babba Metzia (59b). There we find that Rabbi Eliezer differed with his colleagues in a legal matter. He brought miracles and even a Bat Kol ( a voice from Heaven) to support his point. Nevertheless, the law was determined against him by the majority rule in the Court. Since Rabbi Eliezer had support from a voice from Heaven, it would seem that the Sages who disagreed with him were disagreeing with G-d Himself! The Talmud concludes that episode by saying that G-d rejoiced that day saying, "My sons have been victorious over Me. My sons have been victorious over Me!"

These two passages clearly show the unique partnership between G-d and His sages in determining Jewish practice-including the festival laws. This is what Rashi is teaching us. Observing the festivals-determined by the Rabbis-is equal to observing the Sabbath-which is determined by G-d. This is precisely because G-d ordered us to obey the Sages' decisions, even when they seem to go against G-d's own opinion.

This too is the meaning of the Blessings we say in the Shemoneh Esrei on the Sabbath and on the festivals. On the Sabbath we say, "Blessed are You Hashem who sanctified the Sabbath," because G-d is the one who determines when the Sabbath is. On the other hand, on the festival we say "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctified Israel and the festivals." First Israel, meaning its Sages, were sanctified by G-d and then in turn they sanctified the Festivals. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.com

### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

*Summarized by Shaul Barth*

*Translated by David Silverberg*

**E**very year at the beginning of the month of Iyar, we experience Yom Ha-Zikaron (Memorial Day for fallen soldiers) and Yom Ha-Atzmaut (Independence Day) one right after the other. It is usually quite difficult to celebrate joyous occasions so soon after commemorating mournful ones, but Rashi teaches us a profound lesson in this regard in his commentary to Bereishit (6:6): "In a time of joy-there shall be joy, and in a time of grief-there shall be grief."

When I read these comments of Rashi, I cannot help but recall the wedding of my eldest daughter, which took place in the yeshiva immediately after the Yom Kippur War. After all the pain resulting from that war-both the pain of the nation and the pain of our yeshiva, which lost eight students-

I found it very difficult to listen to the band, and I almost did not join in the dancing. But then I was approached by Justice Zvi Tal, whose son's wedding I had performed on Rosh Chodesh Elul, right before the war. His son went out to battle and never returned. Justice Tal mentioned to me these words of Rashi, "In a time of joy-there shall be joy, and in a time of grief-there shall be grief."

Rashi's comments also bring to mind the day of 5 Iyar 5708 (May 14, 1948), when two very significant events transpired. On that day, we received the tragic news of the fall of Gush Etzion and the massacre of its defenders, but on that same day Jewish statehood was declared. It seems that ever since that day, the Jewish Nation has found it difficult to draw a complete separation between bereavement and celebration.

This pattern has repeated itself in recent years, as well, as we witnessed brutal terror attacks on an almost daily basis. Nevertheless, we insist that "in a time of joy-there shall be joy, and in a time of grief-there shall be grief." Indeed, there can be no doubt that despite the pain, there is something to celebrate. In 1948, I learned the dreadful news of the fall of Gush Etzion, and today we see Gush Etzion flourishing and prospering; I simply have no words to describe how this

stirs the heart, and we can declare wholeheartedly, "This is the day that the Lord has made; we shall exult and rejoice on it!"

The prophet relates in II Melakhim (14:23-27): "In the fifteenth year of Amatzya son of Yoash, Yaravam son of Yoash, king of Israel, ruled in Shomron for forty-one years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not deviate from all the sins of Yaravam son of Nevat, who had led Israel to sin. He restored Israel's border from Levo Chamat until the Arava Sea, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken through His servant, the prophet Yona son of Amitai from Gat-Chefer. For the Lord beheld Israel's very bitter suffering, that Israel had hardly a bound or free man, and the Lord did not declare that the name of Israel should be eradicated from under the heavens; and so He saved them through the hands of Yaravam son of Yoash."

A situation arose where there was "hardly a bound or free man," and the Almighty decided to intervene so that the name of Israel would not disappear. I do not wish to compare the situation of Jewish People at the time of the State's founding with the situation during the time of Yaravam ben Yoash, but there has never been a state of near destruction comparable to the one following the Holocaust. Had events unfolded according to their natural course, Heaven forbid, and had the well-arranged armies that invaded the Land of Israel on 5 Iyar and fought against untrained groups of Jews succeeded in overpowering us, we may have indeed reached the point of "the name of Israel would be eradicated from under the heavens," G-d forbid.

We read at the end of Makkot: "Once [the Sages] were ascending to Jerusalem. When they reached Mount Scopus, they rent their garments. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a jackal leaving from the site of the inner sanctum [of the Temple]; they began weeping, but Rabbi Akiva laughed.

"They said to him, 'Why do you laugh?' He said to them, 'Why do you weep?'

"They said to him, 'Jackals now tread on the site regarding which it is written, 'And the foreigner who approaches shall die' (Bamidbar 1:51) -- shall we not weep?'

"He said to them, 'For this very reason I laugh... In the context of [the prophecy of] Uriya it is written, 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed like a field' (Yirmiyahu 26:18), and in [the prophecy of] Zekharya it is written, 'Elderly men and women shall once again sit along the streets of Jerusalem' (Zekharya 8:5). Until Uriya's prophecy was realized, I feared that perhaps Zekharya's prophecy would not be realized; but now that Uriya's prophecy has been realized, it is certain that Zekharya's prophecy will be realized.'

What unique promise did Zekharya's prophecy convey? Did the Jews not know that the Almighty would rescue the nation? There are so many stirring prophecies of redemption in Yeshayahu. Why was it specifically Zekharya's prophecy that provided consolation for Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues?

Moreover, once Rabbi Akiva chose-for whatever reason-to cite from Zekharya, why did he prefer this verse over the immediately preceding passage, which deals directly with the rebuilding of the Temple: "Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and I shall reside in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called 'The City of Truth,' and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, 'The Sacred Mountain'." The rabbis wept upon seeing a jackal scurrying about on the site of the Mikdash. Why did Rabbi Akiva not draw their attention to a prophecy that foretells the rebuilding of the Temple ruins?

It seems that Rabbi Akiva's colleagues would not have found consolation upon hearing the first prophecy, the promise of the Temple's restoration, just as they would not have drawn comfort from Yeshayahu's many prophecies relating to the same theme. Only Zekharya's second prophecy-"Elderly men and women shall once again sit along the streets of Jerusalem"-provided a source of comfort. What is unique about this prophecy?

We find a debate among the Rishonim as to whether human nature will undergo a fundamental change in the Messianic era. The Rambam writes in his Guide of the Perplexed (III:32):

"Although in every one of the signs [miracles] the natural property of some individual being is changed, the nature of man is never changed by G-d by way of a miracle. It is in accordance with this important principle that G-d said, 'O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me...' (Devarim 5:26)."

In other words, G-d will alter nature in performing miracles, but will never change the nature of man. The Ramban, in contrast, presents a different approach in his commentary to Devarim: "'And the Lord shall circumcise your heart' (Devarim 30:6): The following concept that I present emerges from the Scriptures. Namely, since the time of creation people have had the power to do as they wish-to be righteous or wicked-and this is so throughout the time of the Torah, so that they will earn merit by choosing good and punishment by preferring evil. In the times of the Messiah, however, they will by nature choose good; their heart will not desire that which is inappropriate, and one will not crave it at all... At that time, man will return to his state before the sin of Adam, who would by nature do what was appropriate to do and did not wish for something and its opposite... This is the elimination of the evil inclination and the fashioning of the heart [to desire] appropriate conduct... At that time, there will be

no need to train them; rather, their inclination will at that time be altogether eliminated."

According to the Ramban, in the time of Mashiach the Almighty will change the nature of man.

In the 19th Century, R. Shmuel Mohliver suggested the possibility of rebuilding the Mikdash in his time, and he requested a letter of approbation from R. Yehoshua of Kutna. R. Yehoshua, however, responded that rebuilding the Temple at that time would serve no purpose; in any event, the vast majority of the Jewish people had no interest in offering sacrifices. R. Mohliver replied that a minority can bring the public sacrifices on behalf of the entire nation, and sacrifices could thus be offered even if the majority of Jews were uninterested.

The Keli Chemda, a student of R. Yehoshua of Kutna, wrote that R. Mohliver's response did not address the Rav of Kutna's contention. The Rav of Kutna meant that if most of the nation has no interest in offering sacrifices, then there is no possibility of offering on their behalf. The sacrifices have no meaning or purpose if the people on whose behalf they are offered are not ready for it. The Keli Chemda thus concluded by claiming that rebuilding the Mikdash would not solve anything if the people are not ready for it; the Mikdash has no significance until the people show an interest in it.

We can now understand Rabbi Akiva's remarks to his colleagues. Had Rabbi Akiva attempted to console them by citing prophecies about the restoration of the Mikdash, his attempts would have been to no avail. After all, the Rambam maintains that human nature will not undergo any intrinsic change in the times of Mashiach, and the rabbis would not have believed that in the near future Am Yisrael would repent and earn the rebuilding of the Temple. Rabbi Akiva therefore mentioned the promise that "elderly men and women shall once again sit along the streets of Jerusalem;" Zekharya conveys here a different prophecy, one which does not hinge on the previous prophecy of the Temple's restoration. Upon hearing this prophecy, the rabbis felt consoled; they understood that this prophecy could, indeed, unfold already in their time, even before the repentance of the entire nation.

At weddings and sheva berakhot, we recite a blessing which mentions five sounds: "May there again be heard in the cities of Judea and in the markets of Jerusalem the sound of jubilation, the sound of joy, the sound of a groom, the sound of a bride, the sound of the rejoicing of grooms from their canopies and young men from their feast of dancing." The origin of this text is a prophecy of Yirmiyahu (33:11). The first four sounds are identical in both texts. However, whereas in the berakha we describe the fifth "sound" as the sound young men celebrating, Yirmiyahu speaks of a much different "sound:" "The sound of people saying: 'Give thanks to the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His

kindness is eternal'-and of people bringing thanksgiving offerings to the House of the Lord." What a beautiful sound-people expressing thanksgiving to G-d and bringing sacrifices in the Beit Ha-Mikdash! Why did the Sages change the text in formulating this berakha? Why did they not include the sound of people offering sacrifices among the "sounds" that we pray to G-d to restore?

The Sages instituted this berakha in the aftermath of the Temple's destruction. They sought to console the people by telling them that although the ideal state of a rebuilt Mikdash will not likely be achieved in the near future, there is another prophecy that can be fulfilled in the near future- the promise of joy and security. Rabbi Akiva similarly consoled his colleagues in this fashion, insisting that even if the Temple's return does not appear on the horizon, there is still something to anticipate and to give thanks for. Even if the supreme ideal has yet to materialize, we still owe a debt of gratitude to the Almighty for the blessings He has bestowed upon us.

During the Hallel service, we say, "This is the Lord's doing; it is wondrous in our eyes." Indeed, everything that takes place around us is "wondrous in our eyes." Everything that has taken place in the State of Israel since its founding until today has unfolded in a miraculous fashion. The United Nations' decision to establish a Jewish state occurred before East and West had united on any other issue. The War of Independence was also a miracle; it is difficult to describe to you what it was like when organized armies with modern weaponry fought against a nation whose weapons were obtained from secret caches. After the war came the great miracle of immigration, the result of which is today's population of over five million Jews in Israel. The most anti-Israel countries opened their doors and allowed their Jews to emigrate to Israel-an unfathomable irony. The Arabs had fought relentlessly against Jewish immigration to Israel-how did they suddenly allow their Jewish citizens to move to Israel? Each time, a window of opportunity miraculously opened and the Jews were quickly taken to Israel. The Jewish immigration from the Communist nations and the immigrants' absorption in Israel is likewise a remarkable phenomenon. And we have not even begun to discuss the Six Day War and the economic, military and scientific strength of the State of Israel today.

Herzl is always spoken of as the founder of Zionism, but I would argue that his vision was a romantic one, which had no grounding in reality. There was no chance that the Jewish people would leave the Diaspora in order to come to the Land of Israel. Rashi, commenting on the verse, "with a mighty hand he [Pharaoh] shall chase them from his land" (Shemot 6:1), explains that Pharaoh's "mighty hand" was necessary because Bnei Yisrael would otherwise not have agreed to leave. From that time until today, every

wave of mass immigration of Jews to Israel resulted from crisis or life-threatening danger. Even the vision of the State's founders, the men of the second aliya such as Ben Gurion and his colleagues, collapsed on the day statehood was declared and thousands of Jewish refugees came to Israel from internment camps on Cyprus. These leaders had a different vision, a vision of a new people, a strong, powerful country, rather than a religious, exilic people. They scorned the "golus Jew," claiming that he had simply walked like sheep to the slaughter.

Natan Alterman once wrote a poem that tells of a ship bringing refugees to the recently-established State, and he describes the alienation felt by the "sabras" in Israel towards those immigrants and the fundamentally different mentalities of these two populations. He goes on to describe how the immigrants' culture "strangled" the healthy culture of the Israelis, and depicts the struggle that ensued between the immigrants and the natives over the character of the State. This poem was written when this struggle still was being fought, before the mass immigration. Once the thousands of refugees arrived, it became clear that the entire Zionist dream to establish a "new people" had completely collapsed. It is hard to describe what the situation in Israel would be like had events unfolded differently, and we cannot explain in natural terms how this vision crumbled and the State assumed a distinctly Jewish character, a place of refuge for every Jew. "This is the Lord's doing; it is wondrous in our eyes!"

In conclusion, I would remark that "independence" implies acting upon the stage of history and reaching decisions responsibly. Along with the State, G-d gave us several options, and we now face one main concern. Although the State of Israel is strong and will survive, the question remains whether it will be a Jewish state, or simply the State of Israel, in a number of years. We must work to guarantee the Jewish character of the State, as well as the Jewish majority of its population. The "solution" of bringing people of questionable Jewish status here in order to make us the majority does not help-it adds to the problem. I never believed in religious coercion, but I have always believed in a State with a distinctly Jewish character, and right now that character is fading. We cannot fulfill our obligation by simply saying, "G-d will help;" we have to stand up and act!

Let us conclude with the David's stirring words in Tehillim (144:9, 15): "G-d, I shall sing to You a new song; I shall sing praises to You with a ten-stringed harp? Fortunate is the nation who has it so? fortunate is the nation for whom G-d is Lord!" (*This sicha was delivered on Yom Ha-Atzmaut 5763 [2003].*)

