

# Shabbas Shmooze

22 July 2011 - 21 Tammuz 5771

## First Things First

By Shlomo Yaffe

In this week's Torah portion we read that the tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan River, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, concerned that they are not willing to help their brethren in the battle to conquer the Land of Israel. In response, Reuben and Gad propose that they first join, and be the advance troops in, Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

We will build sheepfolds for our livestock here, and cities for our children. We will then arm ourselves quickly [and go] before the children of Israel . . . We shall not return to our homes until each of the children of Israel has taken possession of his inheritance. (Numbers 32:16–18)

Moses then responds in agreement, but changes the order of their projected construction project:

Build yourselves for your children and enclosures for your sheep, and what has proceeded from your mouth you shall do. (Ibid. 32:24)

They were more concerned about their possessions than about their sons and daughters, since they mentioned their livestock before their children. Moses said to them, "Not so! Treat the fundamental as a fundamental, and the secondary as secondary. First build cities for your children, and afterwards enclosures for your sheep."

(Rashi's commentary on this verse)

The tribes had put sheep first, then children. But can it then be that that they actually loved their sheep more than their children?

Rather, it seems to me that they made the assumption that their ability to care for their children was predicated on how many sheep they owned their financial situation. Hence they were always putting their economic involvement first. To this Moses responded: "Worry about your children first; the 'sheep' come last." Ultimately it is G d who provides sustenance. We have to work, and work hard, but we are only creating a vessel, and then G d fills the vessel we create with our toil.

The implication is obvious. Very often, there are so many things we do

not do with our children because of the scheduling demands of our professions and businesses. To this Moses responds: "First things first! Devote yourself to the needs of your children in particular, their spiritual needs and the 'sheep' will happen. To bring children into the world and care for them that is your mission. For your work to bear fruit, that's G d's job." (This after we actually toil and make the "vessel"; no "thumb-twiddling" is being advocated here.)

We must first in the sense of priority as mothers and fathers, see what our children need of us physically and spiritually, and only then we turn to our "sheep" - our economic lives.

### THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

*He shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth (Num. 30:3)*

The commandment to carry out one's verbal declarations was given primarily to the "heads of the tribes" - to the leaders of the Jewish people. As authority figures, they are responsible for setting the highest standards for the rest of the community. That is why the Talmud states in Berachot: "Concerning one who recites the Shema but [his words] do not reach his own ears, Rabbi Yosai opines that he has not fulfilled his obligation." A person must never chastise or reproach another unless he has first applied the same criticism to himself.

# Circumcision in the 21st Century

## Judaism is not a market driven religion

by Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz

It's easy to dismiss the supporters of a November ballot initiative in San Francisco to make it "unlawful to circumcise, excise, cut, or mutilate the whole or any part of the foreskin, testicles, or penis of another person who has not attained the age of 18 years." Like all true believers, these "intactivists" engage in junk science and exaggerated rhetoric about "male genital mutilation". Further discrediting the anti-circumcision cause is the fact that the movement's leadership peddles propaganda that borders on the anti-Semitic, such as the anti-circumcision comic book "Foreskin Man", which reads like a sophomoric plagiary of a superhero cartoon and Der Sturmer. One could imagine that after November the intactivist movement will quickly pass from center stage. But that would be a mistake.

Circumcision is unsettling. As the actor Russell Crowe wrote on Twitter: "I love my Jewish friends, I love the apples and the honey and the funny little hats but stop cutting yr babies." Despite the politically incorrect tone, Crowe makes it clear why the anti-circumcision movement is here to stay: circumcisions are bloody and make babies cry. Even the committed among us are uncomfortable, and most of us look down nervously when the mohel begins the ceremony. It's painful to enter the Covenant of Abraham.

In the past, circumcision was considered attractive because of its health benefits, and even many non-Jews were routinely circumcised. Today, it's debatable if circumcision's health benefits warrant it being a standard procedure. Without a clear medical rationale, non-Jews will stop circumcising their children, and marginally affiliated Jews are sure to follow. The Jewish community can no longer rely on doctors to do the mohel's job, and regardless of the outcome in San Francisco, it will be a lot harder to convince apathetic Jewish parents to perform circumcisions. Why would any parent want to endure the blood, pain and tears of their baby's circumcision for no reason?

In short, circumcision is a marketing nightmare; outside of a deep commitment to Judaism, there's no good reason to do them. This point is significant, because the Jewish community is

intoxicated with marketing. Federations commission countless surveys to find out what young Jews want. Jewish professionals search for ways to make their programs "hipper". The almighty "social media" must be deployed in the battle for the hearts of the younger members of the tribe. Grant money flows liberally to market driven, cutting edge, jargon laden programs with a social media presence.

I can't argue against good marketing; representatives of a religion that has prized ideas should be able to communicate well. But there's a thin line between marketing well and being "market driven". The market driven vision believes that the customer is always right. So if it's Yiddish or yoga or Jewish jokes that turn young Jews on, let's pour community resources into a Yiddish Yoga Yuckfest. (With bagels, lox and cream cheese, of course). Instead

of challenging young Jews, a market driven vision of Judaism seeks to produce a 21st century Judaism that will make our customers happy.

But here comes the problem. Aspects of Judaism like circumcision will always be unpopular in customer surveys. If we leave the future of Judaism in the hands of marketing experts, challenging rituals like circumcision or Passover or Yom Kippur will be ignored, and we will end up with a smooth syncretistic mumbo jumbo that has no resemblance to our 3,000 year old tradition.

I'm a modern Orthodox rabbi who talks a great deal about the place of Judaism in the 21st century. But increasingly I've come to realize that circumcision is incompatible with the times, as is much of Judaism. But Jews should be proud of how different we are. In an era of unprecedented individualism and hedonism, Jews declare that community is critical, even for an eight day old baby. We take pride in a ritual that affirms that sexual desire is not meant to be left unrestrained, but must be shaped by values of fidelity and devotion. When others seek endless comfort, we are willing to say that doing the right thing might be painful, but it's still worthwhile.

Over the years, I've met inspiring people from the Former Soviet Union who performed circum-

**"Circumcision is incompatible with the times, as is much of Judaism"**

cisions under heroic circumstances. Defying the Communist dictatorship, they would huddle surreptitiously and perform the covenant of Abraham on children of varying ages. The amazing thing is that these Jews in the FSU had no Jewish education whatsoever. But even with only a rudimentary knowledge of Judaism, they understood that being Jewish means going against

the current, and being Jewish requires personal sacrifice.

Even though Jews in the Western world enjoy freedom and prosperity, we need to explain to young Jews that they too have to be willing to defy the spirit of the times to be Jewish. After all, Judaism is more than apples, honey and funny little hats.

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## **Stones with a Soul**    **The Western Wall - Where the Soul is always whole**

by Mendy Herson

### **The Western Wall**

It's been in the news lately and is frequently a focal point of Jewish and world consciousness.

But what is it?

For eight hundred and thirty years, a Holy Temple (Beit Hamikdash, in Hebrew) stood as the center of the Jewish world. The Temple was more than a building; it was the supreme point of contact – the nexus – between the human and the Divine.

But what was, no longer is.

The Temple no longer stands; it was destroyed by the Babylonians and later by the Romans. We haven't had a Temple for more than two thousand years. All we have is the "Western Wall," a remnant of a once-magnificent structure.

That's it.

But, again, what is "it"?

Is the Western Wall a place of national nostal-

gia, a focal point for our collective pining over a lost glory? Is it the symbol of our hopes for the future?

Yes. And Yes. But that's not all.

The Western Wall is more than a psychological trigger.

It's a symbol of what still exists.

From a Judaic perspective, We are each a "Holy Temple," a Sanctuary for the Divine. The Temple's "body" was destroyed but its "soul" remains whole. The Babylonians and Romans – outside forces – destroyed the buildings, but had and have no control over the spirit.

The Divine Presence still resonates in that spot.

So the Western Wall remains a current place of contact, a fresh reservoir of Holiness.

The Temple's soul is whole.

## *The Parasha in a Nutshell*

### **Matot**

*Numbers 30:2-32:42*

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel. War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the high priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Menasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

**Welcome to the residents of Glendale who are spending Shabbat with us. Shalom!**



## **Morning, G-d**



There are only two kinds of people in the world. There are those who wake up in the morning and say, "Good morning, G-d," and there are those who wake up in the morning and say, "Good G-d, it's morning."

# Thank You!

**Shabbas Shmooze:** Sponsored by Alan, Bettina, Ariel & Amelie Seaberg & Gerald Bard.

**Children's Chocolates:** Sponsored by Greg Krupp on commemorating his father's Yahrzeit.

**Security:** To this week's volunteers - Charlene Shapiro's team. (Next week duty - Shelly Maree's team).

# Mazel tov!

Lilo Weber on the birth of her great grandson in Israel.

Rose Katz on the engagement of her grandson, Jonathan Margolius to Caryn Rogaly.

Alan & Linda Holzman on the engagement of their son, Gavin to Sarah Chitrin.

Leonard & Karen Yankelowitz on the birth of their granddaughter.

Michael & Candice Locketz on the birth of their daughter.

# Condolences:

Neville & Morrie Cohen on the loss of their mother, Mildred Cohen

Stephen Levin on the loss of his mother, Miriam Levin.

Esther Figov on the loss of her sister Josephine Bekker.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

*So Whats Nu?*

## The Living Newspaper Quiz:

An invitation is extended to all to enjoy a fulfilled evening on Monday 25th July at 7.30 p.m. The quiz will be preceded with a brilliant new laser show.

Admission R20 including refreshments.

## Weizmann Grade Dinner:

Weizmann Primary School, Weizmann PTA and our Shul invite all Grade 4 pupils and their families to a Shabbat service and supper in our hall on Friday 29th July.

The service commences at 5.45 p.m.

## Daven E Café:

Another quality opportunity for the youngish guys to daven and have breakfast with Rabbi Wineberg on Friday 29th July from 7.00 am to 8.30am in our Small Shul.

# Shul Services

**Candle lighting: 5.42pm**

**Friday evening service: 5.45pm**

**Sermon:** Rabbi Dovid Wineberg -

Cantor Ivor Joffe & Choir conducted by David Gordon

**Saturday Shacharit: 8.45am • Maftir:** Avron Kaplan

**Torah:** Cohen 955, Hertz 702, L/T 822, A/S 900

**Haftarah:** Cohen 968, Hertz 710, L/T 1212 A/S 1192

Shiur by Rabbi Wineberg after Kiddush Bracha on

**"What's the foulest 4 lettered word in English? H-A-T-E. How to defeat hate"**

**Mincha: 5.15pm • Ma'ariv: 6.25pm • Shabbat Ends: at 6.36pm**

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Social Worker: Shirley Greenstein, Cantor Emeritus Philip Badash