

PRAYER

Now is the time to let the mind search backwards like
the raven loosed to see what can feed us.

*Now, the time to cast the mind forward to chart an
aerial map of the months.*

Rosh Hashanah is a great door that stands across the
evening and *Yom Hakkippurim* is the second door.

*Between them are song and silence, stone and clay pot
to be filled from within myself.*

I will find there both ripeness and rot, what I have done
and undone. What I must let go with the waning days
and what I must take in.

With the last tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.

Marge Piercy

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

**May you live as long as you want,
And never want as long as you live!**

Unknown



September 24, 2011

כה אלול תשע"א

Parashat Nitzavim-Vayelech - Deuteronomy 29:9-31:30
(נצבים - וילך)

Hertz – p 878

Stone – p 1086

Haftarah – Isaiah 61:10-63:9

Hertz – p 883

Stone – p 1202

Kiddush luncheon co-sponsored by
Stuart Kaufman in honor of the
“10th” birthday of his wife, Judy
and by
Maurice Goffstein in honor of his 91st birthday

Rabbi Gordon’s Talmud Class – 4:30 PM

Seudah Sh’lishit sponsored by Jeff Rose
in memory of his father, Edward Rose

Minchah – 5:45 PM

Shabbat Ends – 7:39 PM

On This Week's Torah Portion

נצבים – וילך

Lo bashamayim hi/It is not in Heaven (30:12)

There is quite a lot that can be, and has been, said about this verse, in which Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts us to be zealous in our study of Torah and our fulfillment of its commandments. From it we are encouraged that it is fully within the capability of the human mind and heart to be able to comprehend Gd's teaching and to apply it in everyday life. This is no small thing, since Gd is infinite and the standard of behavior that Torah requires is complete conformance of our individuality with Gd's universal nature.

However the quote is perhaps more widely known from a famous Talmudic passage. There was a debate between R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and the rest of the academy over the susceptibility of a certain kind of (earthenware) oven to ritual impurity. After much argument, R. Eliezer cried out "If I am right, let this carob tree prove it" and the carob tree spontaneously moved many meters from its place. The Rabbis responded "no proof can be brought from a carob tree." Similar "proofs" were brought from a stream of water that flowed backwards and from the walls of the study hall which began to lean dangerously inwards, and were rejected as well. Finally R. Eliezer said, "If I am right may a voice from Heaven (*bat kol*) prove it," and the voice responded "Why do you contend with my son Eliezer, seeing that the *halachah* follows him in all respects!" R. Yehoshua arose and said "*Lo bashamayim hi*" – once Gd gave His Torah (both Written and Oral) over to the Rabbinic leadership it is the established *human* process of exegesis that determines *halachah*. Torah was not given to the angels; it was given to human beings, and it is the Rabbinic leadership of each generation that is empowered to interpret Torah for that generation, as Torah itself says in a number of places: "You shall go to the judges who will be in that day." In a postscript to this incident, one of the Rabbis met Elijah the Prophet and asked him what Gd's reaction to the incident was. Elijah replied "Gd exclaimed [in delight] 'My children have defeated Me! Gd Himself put his imprimatur on R. Yehoshua's interpretation.

When we are discussing the Sages of the Mishnah we must understand that these men were not just legal theoreticians nor masters of casuistry. They possessed a knowledge and experience of the depths of spirituality that is at best extremely rare nowadays. How many of us can call on heavenly voices to support us in debate, or move trees or walls to prove our points? When they express an opinion about a Torah matter, it comes, in my opinion, not simply from intellectual reasoning or even intuition born of years of contemplation of the issues. Rather I think that they have been able to put their minds so in tune with Gd's Mind, as expressed in our Torah tradition, that they become living embodiments of that tradition. If they say that the structure of creation is a certain way, it comes from a kind of direct perception of that reality. This kind of deep, inner knowledge of Torah and its relationship to objective reality is sometimes called *da'at Torah*, or simply *Knowledge* of Torah – knowledge with a capital K, meaning direct knowledge, from inside. To these great Sages Torah is not something outside themselves, rather they, Torah and their Knowledge of Torah are one.

This idea of a Sage expressing *da'at Torah* has been applied to contemporary sages as well. For example, a prominent neurosurgeon used to consult with the Chazon Ish (R. Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz, died 1953) before performing sensitive surgery. Now the Chazon Ish had no training in medicine or surgery, yet he had a deep, intuitive grasp of reality that allowed him to advise the physician, to the benefit of his patients. Going a bit further back, the Chasidic movement has a wealth of tales of "wonder-working Rebbes" who could know and/or do things beyond the reach of the great mass of humanity.

As we can see from the Talmudic passage however, *da'at Torah* is no guarantee of a kind of "papal infallibility." Sages of equal and exalted stature can disagree, and such disagreements have taken place throughout our history – Hillel and Shammai, R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua, Rava and Abaye in the Talmud and so on throughout the tradition. Unfortunately this idea appears to be getting a bit hijacked in certain segments of the Jewish world, where unthinking conformance to the pronouncements of certain great Rabbis is demanded, not only from his followers, but from everyone else as well, on the grounds that every decision of theirs is based on *da'at Torah*. This, it appears to me, runs contrary to the general principles by which the Jewish community is governed, based on majority rule of the Sages (plural!) of the generation. R. Yehudah haNasi, certainly one of the greatest and holiest of our Sages, redacted the Mishnah – *da'at Torah* must have been at a peak in him, yet often enough in the very Mishnayot that he himself edited, his opinion is cited as a minority opinion – worthy of respect, but not the final *halachah*. And R. Eliezer himself, of whom Heaven itself testified that his opinions were correct, was excommunicated by his colleagues for refusing to submit to the majority!

Ultimately it is the goal of Torah that each of us come into an intimate and personal relationship with Gd – in the words of Torah, to "cling" to Gd. The Rabbis ask, "How can one cling to Gd, who is described as a 'consuming fire'?" They answer, one can cling to the Sages. By serving a Sage who is so imbued with the essence of Torah that he literally breathes Torah, learning not only from his lectures, but by his every action, we can gradually attune our minds and hearts to radiate *da'at Torah*. As Moshe Rabbeinu expressed it, "Would that all of Gd's people were Prophets!" Then truly we will bring Torah down from Gd's heavens and make it a living reality here on earth!

*Shabbat shalom,
Rafi Rabinoff*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Motzei Shabbat, Sept. 24 **Selichot Program & Services.** Showing and discussion of the Coen Brothers' Oscar-nominated film, "A Serious Man," a comedy drama centered on Larry Gopnik, a Midwestern professor who watches his life unravel through multiple sudden incidents. Film & refreshments at 9:30 PM, followed by discussion, and then *Selichot* services.

Sunday, Sept. 25 **Volunteers needed to set up our Sanctuary for the High Holydays**, please help out at 10:00 AM.

Sunday, Sept. 25 **Medical Equipment Donation Drive @B'nai Amoona**, 9 AM-2 PM. Donations of new or used medical devices will be cleaned, refurbished and loaned to those in need at no cost.

Sunday, Sept. 25 **Shop the new fall collection—skirts, tops, dresses.** 725 Old Bonhomme Rd, 10 AM – 5 PM, *mention Traditional and a portion of the sale will be donated to our shul.* For more info or a private appointment, call Orli Axelbaum, 314-724-1134

Wed. Sept. 28 **Office Closed**

Thursday – Friday, September 29-30 **Rosh Hashanah.** See special service times below and Newsletter for complete Schedule of Services.

Sunday, Oct. 2 "Travel Me Jewish" meeting for parents/teens to discuss Jewish travel experience program, 10:00 AM

Sunday, Oct. 2 **Membership Committee meeting** for those who would like to help solicit ads for our new Directory. If you always want to help and need a short-term project, this is it. 10:00 AM. If you would like to help but can't make the meeting, call Elaine Farkas at 314-439-9747 or 954-558-1159.

Sunday, Oct. 2 **Stitch 'N Schmooze**, 10:00 AM. Time to get knitting!

Tues. Oct 4 **Hannah Rosenthal, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism for the US State Dept.** speaks on "Passionate Leadership," 7:30 PM, The Plaza in Clayton. \$18 includes dessert reception, call Karen Sher to register, 314-442-3824.

Refuah Sh'leimah to...Norton Kronemer

...Frank Altman

Condolences to...Tobie Hupert on the passing of her brother, Ronald Packman

...Barry Lasky on the passing of his mother, Molly Lasky

Mazal Tov to...Michael Neidorff on being selected as 2012 Man of the Year by Variety, the Children's Charity.

...Naomi Fishman on being featured in St Louis Magazine for Sukkah City STL.

DAILY SERVICE TIMES

Sunday morning – 9:00 AM; Monday - Wednesday morning – 7:00 AM

Thursday-Friday morning – 8:00 AM

Monday - Tuesday evening – 6:30 PM; **Wednesday evening 6:15 PM**

Thursday evening 6:40 PM; Friday evening 6:15 PM