

MAY 29, 2010 16 Sivan 5770 Parshat Beha'alotecha

Orthodox Union-West Coast Offices: 9831 W. Pico Blvd., LA CA 90035 www.ouwestcoast.org

KASHRUTH: 310.229.9000 EXT.1 ■ NCSY: 310.229.9000 EXT.209 ■ OU/SYNAGOGUE SERVICES: 310.229.9000 EXT.200 ■ FAX: 310.229.9011 ■ EMAIL: westcoast@ou.org

Parshas B'Haaloscha "Omissions and Additions"

The Torah is replete with words that are *Chaseir* or *Malei*. A word that is *Chaseir* is a word that seems to be missing a letter while a word that is *malei* is written with all of its letter's intact. Generally speaking there are two letters in the Hebrew language, the *Yud* and the *Vav*, that can be added to a word but yet seem to be expendable as well, meaning that the word will read the same way with or without these letters. We are all aware that there are no extra words or any extra letters in the Torah. Therefore if a word has the *vav* and could be read without it, there must be a reason that it is there or not. There are hundreds of examples of this throughout *Tanach*. The question then arises as to why sometimes the very same word is written full, *Malei* or *Chaseir*, missing. Even more challenging are the situations when a word is mentioned twice within a *passuk* and one time it is written one way and the second time the other way.

In the opening *passuk* in this week's *parsha B'Haaloscha* it says "*Dabair el Aharon V'Amarta Aleihem, B'Haaloscha es HaNeir's* (without a *Vav*) *el Mul Pnei HaMenorah Yairu Shivas HaNeiros* (with a *Vav*). **RABBI YISRAEL BE'ERI KODNER** in his commentary *Zahav B'Miluasam* on *Chumash* explains the *Chaseir/Malei* phenomena in *Tanach*. The *Vav* in a word is a sign of completeness and wholesomeness, and its absence connotes that it is lacking in something. In our case of the candles, the word *Neiros* is first written without a *vav* because the candles at that point are not set into the candelabra. Rather they were taken outside and lit and are therefore considered incomplete. They can only be complete when they are lit in the holders of the *Menorah* itself. The *Ohr Hachaim HaKadosh* explains that when the candles were taken down to be cleaned and then lifted back up to be arranged again in the *Menorah* the word *Neiros* is without *vav*. The *Neiros/candles* are only a part of what their potential is supposed to be. The second time the word *Neiros/candles* are mentioned in the *passuk* is when they have been lit and are IN the *Menorah*. The

candles, together with the Candelabra, is now *Shaleim*, it is now complete, so the word *Neiros* is full with the *vav*. If one was to analyze each time the word is used you can decipher whether or not it is being used in its full or partial form.

There are times when a person is preparing something to be baked. Even if all the ingredients are mixed together but it's not yet been in the oven it is not ready to be eaten. So too when it comes to learning and doing of *Mitzvos*. There are times when we prepare to do a *Mitzva* but we never finish it off. We go out *erev Sukkos* and purchase a *lulav* and *esrog* and all its trimmings, but when it comes to the last component of actually doing the *Mitzva* we sometimes fall short. There is a certain excitement in getting ready and preparing for the *Mitzva* but we sometimes slack off when it comes to finishing. If we only buy the *lulav*, or clean the *chanukiah*, practice blowing the *Shofar* but don't use it properly at the right time in the right place then we are lacking in the *vav* of that *mitzva*. We in our every day lives get bogged down with all the prep and hype of an event, or a *mitzva*, and never fully appreciate or complete the task at hand. One of the major benefits in completing something is the accompanying feeling of peace and tranquility that comes as a result of our finishing. We find this in that city in Israel known as *Yerushalayim*, or *Ir Shalem* and it is the city of peace. Let us all share in the enthusiasm to prepare the *mitzvos* and have the wherewithal to complete them and bring forth light of the full *Neiros* (with a *vav*) that we shall merit to light once again in the *Bayis Shlishi B'Meheira V'Yameinu*, Amen.

Ah Gut Shabbos

Rabbi Avram Bogopulsky
Beth Jacob, San Diego

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- **Shabbat JUNE 19:** Guest Rabbi Dr. Daniel Lerner
- **Shabbat JUNE 26:** Guest Elliot Brandt, AIPAC
- **Shabbat JULY 3:** Guest, OU President Steve Savitsky
- **Shabbat JULY 16-17:** S-I-R Rabbi Natan Slifkin, 'The Zoo Rabbi'

Calabasas Shul: (818) 591-7485

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LA: Adas Torah (310) 203-9659 www.adastorah.com

LA: Aish Hatorah (310) 278-8672 x 305 or tsullivan@aishla.com

LA: B'nai David-Judea (310)-276-9269 or amram@bnaidavid.com

- **SUN JUNE 6:** Dinner honoring Lloyd/Sonia Levitin & Duke/Vicki Helfand
- LA: Etz Jacob (323) 938-2619

LA: Mogen David Cong. (310) 556-5609

LA: Young Israel of Century City: (310) 273-6954

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LA: Yeshiva of LA (YOLA) 310-203-3197 yeshivarabbi@juno.com

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Laguna Woods, CA: Beth Torah (949) 587-1967 (a retirement community)

La Jolla: Adat Yeshurun (858) 535-1196

- **SUN JUNE 6:** Shul Banquet Gala
 - **SUN JUNE 13, 8:30am-2:30pm:** Blood Drive. www.redcrossblood.org Code: CAY
- Las Vegas, NV: Shaarei Tefila (702) 384-3565 (Mikva 384-3317)

Oakland, CA: Beth Jacob (510) 482-1147

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Valley Village, CA: Shaarey Zedek Cong. (818) 763-0560

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- **SUNS @ 8:30am:** following 8am minyan-Shiur-Baba Kama w/Rabbi Yaakov Rechnitz

West LA: Westwood Kehilla (310) 441-5288x2 director@kehilla.org

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www.Israel21c.org

Does Prayer Have a Prayer?

By David Suissa

"Prayer can be utterly boring," Rabbi Elazar Muskin said to a gathering in his own house of prayer, Young Israel of Century City. Muskin was the last of three rabbis to speak on the subject last Shabbat afternoon, after Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky of B'nai David-Judea Congregation and Rabbi Kalman Topp of Beth Jacob Congregation.

The event was part of a national initiative from the Orthodox Union called "Making Our Tefillot More Personal and Meaningful," and it was introduced by Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, its West Coast director for community and synagogue services.

The initiative makes a lot of sense, if only because, let's face it, prayer can be boring. Boredom might not have been an issue in the shtetls of our ancestors, but it certainly is in our world, when "Thou shalt be entertaining" has become the 11th Commandment.

The problem cuts across all denominations, but it takes a different slant in the Orthodox community, where shul members feel a strong communal obligation to attend services every Shabbat, and where anti-boredom props like musical instruments are strictly forbidden.

Without the benefit of flutes and drum circles, Orthodox rabbis must find other ways to convince their members not to schmooze about the Lakers and the price of real estate during davening. This is no easy feat. One of the great benefits of going to shul is the very idea of reconnecting with those we don't see during the week. We are social animals. We need to talk.

When we talk to God, we're never sure if He's listening or answering. But when we ask our buddies sitting next to us how they feel about the latest balagan between Obama and Israel, we can be sure to get a response.

So, while Orthodox rabbis don't have to compete with Starbucks or 24 Hour Fitness on Shabbat, they do have to compete with human nature: It's a lot more fun to schmooze than to pray.

This is the mountain that the three rabbis had to climb on Shabbat afternoon, and while I don't think they made it to the top, they came closer than I expected.

Kanefsky led off by suggesting that prayer can improve your life instantly. The three steps we take right before the silent prayer, he said, are really meant to elevate us. He asked us to imagine entering a private bubble three steps above the ground, where we would think about a specific problem during our silent prayer - a problem with a spouse, with a job, with a friend or relative, etc. - and allow God's creative and healing energy to enter.

By focusing on the word "Atah" (You), we make our connection with God more intimate. This helps us come out of the bubble on a higher level than when we entered. Intention makes the difference.

Topp focused on the idea of authenticity, to oneself and to the moment. He told the story of a rebbe who allowed a follower to imitate his intense davening. When the rebbe saw "himself" davening, he realized that he made the mistake of trying to "imitate himself" - he wasn't being true to the moment. We should follow the structure of prayer, Topp told us, but also improvise with our own touches and our feelings of the moment, and not "imitate ourselves" every time we pray.

Muskin focused on two things to make the prayer experience "anything but boring": the importance of slowing down, and the importance of expressing gratitude. On the first, he held up Chief Rabbi of England Jonathan Sacks' prayer book as a great example of prayer that "slows down," and he announced that his shul would soon be offering classes on the meaning of prayer.

But it was the second thing he talked about - expressing gratitude - that got me thinking about the ultimate solution to the prayer conundrum. Muskin mentioned that since he's had a pain in his leg, his prayers have been more intense because he's so appreciative of the times that the pain is not there.

As he spoke, I thought, "Eureka! This is the solution!" Shuls should be renamed Thank You Houses, and every Jew should be asked the following: Are you grateful that you can see, walk, hear or breathe? Well, then, here's the deal: In return for all those blessings, sacrifice a little of your time and come say thank you once a week.

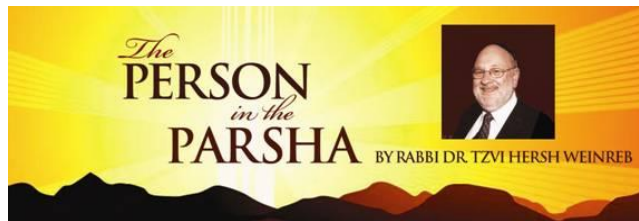
In other words, forget whether the shul is boring, whether you like the chazzan or the rabbi's sermon, or whether the service is inspirational or stimulating. Those are all bonuses. You're in shul primarily to give tzedakah to God: to express your gratitude for the things that are most valuable to you. You love your children? Come say thank you that you have them. You love the fact that you can listen to great music? Same thing - come say thank you.

The idea is to recognize a shul's limitations and turn it into a virtue. A prayer service can never compete with the "entertainment" of a great show or movie, nor should it want to. But with its many rituals and prayers that honor the Creator, a shul is uniquely qualified to facilitate one of the most meaningful and universal acts of the Jewish tradition: the act of gratitude.

You like the fact that you're healthy enough to schmooze? Dedicate a few hours next Shabbat just to say thank you. That prayer, thank God, never gets boring.

David Suissa is the founder of OLAM magazine, OLAM.org and a weekly columnist for the Los Angeles Jewish Journal.

You can read his daily blog at suissablog.com and e-mail him at Suissa@olam.org



Parshat Beha'alotecha

May 29, 2010 – 16 Sivan 5770

To read more articles and essays by Rabbi Weinreb, visit his blog at www.ou.org/rabbi_weinreb

"A Candle of God is the Soul of Man"

I no longer remember which Israeli artist colony I was visiting. Perhaps Jaffa. But I will never forget the crude, almost primitive paintings, which were on exhibit. They were all very different in color, style, and size. They varied from somber dark browns and grays to tropical oranges, reds, and yellows.

Some were very realistic, some impressionistic, some totally abstract. One was a large mural. But in the corner, there were postcard-sized miniatures. In every painting, a candle predominated.

The artist was obsessed with the image of the candle. A tall, slim candle, wax dripping down its side, the wick erect, the flame flickering. Somehow, each candle evoked the picture of a person.

I made a note of the artist's name, hoping that one day I would be able to afford one his works, and would then find him, but I lost the scrap of paper with his name and address long ago.

The memory of the candles bedecking his workroom walls has remained with me. As long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by candles and by their human-like quality. In my early teens, I was taught to meditate in front of a burning candle, and to associate my meditation with the biblical phrase, "A candle of God is the soul of man".

"What are some ways that human beings resemble candles?" This question was assigned to me by the old rabbi who was my first spiritual guide. In my early adolescence I was part of a group of six or seven peers who met with this rabbi once a month in a dark and, you guessed it, candlelit room.

It was our task to gaze at a burning candle and imagine the affinities between candles and men. At the end of the month, we were to report on our findings.

I never returned at the end of that month. Without that closure, it is no wonder that I still reflect, fifty years later, on the resemblances between people and candles.

This week's Torah portion speaks of the candles that Aaron lit in the ancient Tabernacle. The Bible speaks not of the "lighting of" the candles, but of the "raising up" of the candles. The commentaries eagerly point out that it is not sufficient to kindle the candle; one must see to it that the flame will continue to burn on its own.

The candle thus becomes a metaphor for the process of teaching: parent to child, or master to disciple. It is never

sufficient to merely touch the child with the flame of knowledge. Rather, one must "raise up" the flame so that it will grow and will nurture the student for a long time. The task of the teacher is to ensure that the flame will continue to burn on its own, that knowledge will be a lifetime process.

There is another traditional Jewish saying which inspires me: "A little bit of light can dispel much darkness". The little candle teaches us how much good a single person, or even a single act, can accomplish. It is not necessary for one to try to ignite powerful floodlights. If all that one can do is light a match, that paltry act can achieve unforeseen illumination.

Finally, there is a Talmudic dictum, "A candle for one is a candle for a hundred". There are certain things in life, an item of food for example, which can only meet the needs of one person. There are other things, certain tools for example, which can only meet the needs of one person at a time. But one candle can benefit the single individual who needs illumination, and it can shed equal illumination for many others in the room. A candle for one is a candle for a hundred.

And so it is in the human realm. There are things that we can do which will benefit not only a single particular other but an entire group, an entire community, an entire world. If we teach, for example, lessons that are useful practically and that are spiritually uplifting, those lessons are not limited to who hears them. Rather, they can benefit many unseen others. Intellectual accomplishments and religious achievements are candles not just for one, but for hundreds.

I have listed but three of the infinite number of ways in which the soul of man is the candle of God. Candle lighting symbolizes the teaching process; the single act can have massive consequences; and we can affect a much wider circle than we think.

The opening verses in this week's Torah portion render the candle image so central to the Tabernacle and Temple service, because the Torah wishes us to think about the candle, to meditate on it, and to discover for ourselves the manifold analogies which lie embedded in the candle image.

"Behold the candle," the Torah exclaims. It is one of the oldest, and certainly one of the simplest, human tools. But it can be a metaphor for the power and the potential of the human soul, which is no less than the candle of God.