

Kayruv



קירוב

“Judaism for Today In a Warm and Caring Environment”

June 2021

Sivan/Tammuz 5781

FROM THE RABBI



Dear Friends,

Is there such a thing as “Jewish time”? We’ve all heard the exchange “What time? Oh, about 8-ish.” The “ish” is our gift to the American vernacular. The truth is that there really is a Jewish root to “ish”

because the origins of the Jewish sense of time really do differ from Western culture.

Biblical Israel’s concept of time differs fundamentally from contemporary usage. In classical Hebrew thinking, there is no conceptual separation between an event and the time in which it occurs. In fact, when you study Torah, one of the first principles you learn is “*ayn mukdam v’ayn muchar*” meaning there is no future or past regarding a strict chronology of recorded bible events. Western concepts of time, by contrast, are rooted in Greek philosophy which presumes space is the primary dimension.

Time is described and conceived of in terms of spatial phenomena. For example, the metaphors “time line” and “point in time” are directly derived from geometry. Past, present and future are its predominant qualitative characteristics and by necessity implies a static conceptualization rather than the dynamic, rhythmic one of Hebrew thinking. The Jewish psyche understands time as a fluid concept. So we really do have a reason for always starting things a little late - we are a dynamic, rhythmic people who, by nature, won’t be constrained by the clock!

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***Kayruv* means “Welcoming.”**

Why do I tell you all this now? Because I have been thinking a lot about time lately - about my past, present and future. I am coming up on my first year anniversary here at Congregation B'nai Israel. Overcoming the challenges of COVID while getting to know each other has not been easy but I have to say we not only survived, we thrived! It has been one of the greatest years of my life. Don't get me wrong, I have led a very full life but everything from my past has come together in being your congregational rabbi. The warmth, kindness, and compassion of CBI sets it high above all other synagogues in my past experiences. This first year had the potential to be very rocky, but your trust in me has allowed CBI to really flourish with new ideas and opportunities to pray, learn and play! CBI really is a "haimishe" place to belong and I am truly blessed to have you in my life. May we share many more full and fulfilling years together. This, as they say, is the start of something good!

Enjoy your time outdoors in the warmth of summer!
 Rabbi Nebel

RABBI'S OFFICE HOURS

Rabbi Nebel invites you to meet with her and will be available any day except Wednesday and Shabbat. Please contact her at:
cbi193clap@gmail.com

Thank You!

Dear Friends,

Since breaking my wrist a couple of weeks ago, I have been overwhelmed by the love and support of our synagogue community. The phone calls, well wishes, and food have been such a tremendous showing of how much you care. I just wanted to say thank you and how much I appreciate it.

With love,
 Lois Stein

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends

I am not great with goodbyes, so I will repeat in this, my last Kayruv article as president, my thanks for all the support and caring you have given me over the past two years. A few weeks ago, Dr. Paul Simon delivered a wonderful *D'var Torah*, and I asked him if he would be kind enough to share it with everyone.

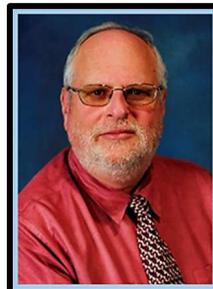
G-d Bless our beloved congregation, our beloved country, and our beloved Israel.



Try to remember.....

"Ask not what B'nai Israel can do for you, but rather what YOU can do for B'nai Israel!"

Paul's *Dvar Torah*



To me a *D'var Torah* should challenge; encourage people to think; to question their beliefs and assumptions. Perhaps that will happen to you and as in cartoons, the light bulb will spring from your

mind.

In the introduction to *B'Har, Etz Hayim* indicates that the reason we return land to its original owner at the end of a fifty-year cycle is to "prevent the polarization of society into two classes; wealthy, powerful landowners on the one hand and permanently impoverished people on the other". Chapter 25, verse 25 states "If your kinsman is in straits....". A footnote for the phrase indicates that we must extend help to people in financial need so the situation does not worsen. It further notes that "according to Maimonides, helping people help themselves become financially independent is the highest form of *tz'dakah*."

Have we, as a society, done, and are we doing, everything we can to prevent that polarization? I am amazed at the total compensation paid to corporate CEOs. The Securities and Exchange Commission requires companies to post the ratio of the CEO salary to the median salary of the work force. For at least the companies whose annual reports I have reviewed, the ratio is over 200 to one. Now to be fair, perhaps some of those CEOs contribute a portion of their wealth to charity, but is it enough to prevent that polarization.

One way we all can help alleviate this polarization is through *tz'dakah*.

We just read in Leviticus 26:3 "If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant" The following verses address all the good, the rewards, that will occur. That is followed with a much longer list of punishments. With rewards and punishment on my mind, I ask, is *tz'dakah* one of those commandments that if followed, will provide rewards?

The Jewish Virtual Library provides an answer. "The word *tz'dakah* derives from the Hebrew word *tzedek*, "justice." Performing deeds of justice is perhaps the most important obligation Judaism imposes on the Jew.

"*Tzedek, tzedek* you shall pursue," the Torah instructs (Deuteronomy 16:20). Hundreds of years later, the Talmud taught: "*Tz'dakah* is equal to all other commandments combined." (*Bava Batra* 9b) From Judaism's perspective, therefore, one who gives *tz'dakah* is acting justly; one who doesn't, unjustly."

Why do these concepts jump out to me and why do I want to share them with you? I want to expand on the concept of who receives *tz'dakah*. Helping those in need can be extended to anyone/anything in need; human, animal or object. That to me is *tz'dakah*. Help can be in the form of direct financial support, or tangible items such as clothing, food, toys, etc, or even intangible items such as your time, caring and comfort. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it has taught the importance of *tz'dakah*. Through no fault of their own, people found themselves and continue to find themselves in need. Many

times I have said to myself, if not for the grace of G-d, it could have been me. I have a responsibility to help, to give back. While I can't return land in the jubilee year, I can assist in other ways.

Some of you might be offended that I am expanding the concept of helping those in need to include animals, but that is how I feel. As most of you know, this past August I rescued two dogs. They have taught me the importance of helping all creatures. I am writing this on Wednesday morning, and just watched a report on the news about a new elephant sanctuary in Florida for retired Ringling Brothers circus elephants. They now have a large sanctuary to roam, bond and live out their lives. Those who contributed to that cause definitely obeyed the commandment of *tz'dakah*.

Those who assist the shul through monetary means, their time and/or their skills, are obeying the commandment of *tz'dakah*; providing help to those in need. More on that to follow.

I now go back to the polarization of society. I ask, has anything changed; what factors in modern society continue to lead, in my opinion, to the continuation of this polarization within our society. The *Parshiot* address two classes. Do we not have three general classes today, wealthy, middle class and poor? Do we not have gradations of each of those classes? Perhaps, but which are the fastest growing, is it the middle or the two extremes. Are we doing all we can to prevent that polarization? I leave it to you to ponder that question.

As a society, are we living the concept of *tz'dakah*? Why do we, and should we, provide *tz'dakah*? Do we give it to see our names on a wall in a museum or on a building? Should we get credit for providing it, or just do it for altruistic reasons. Rabbi Daniel S. Nevins, Dean of the Rabbinical School and the Dean of the Division of Religious Leadership at the Jewish Theological Seminary wrote in the *Sh'ma* journal in October 2011 and reprinted in the Jewish News of Northern California, on November 4, 2011, "*Tz'dakah* today exists in a fallen state much more akin to "charity" than to the obligatory actions of righteousness idealized in rabbinic

sources. We have created a philanthropic culture that lavishes honor on donors who have the “vision to invest” in chosen initiatives. Ordinary communal needs such as poverty relief, elder care and subsidized Jewish education suffer from benign neglect.”

I disagree with some of the ideas of Rabbi Nevins. I believe that for some donors giving is all the thanks they need, but others want to be acknowledged for their donations. So for whatever reason you provide *tz’dakah*, please do it; think about the good you can do through *tz’dakah*.

Looking for more about the subject, I went to the source of all knowledge, Wikipedia. It states “unlike voluntary philanthropy, *tz’dakah* is seen as a religious obligation that must be performed regardless of one’s financial standing, and so it is mandatory even for those with limited financial means.” Even the poor have a responsibility to provide *tz’dakah*, not at the same level perhaps as an affluent person, but still there is a need to fulfil the commandment of *tz’dakah*.

The next theme I want to address was not read as part of the triennial cycle. Chapter 27 addresses the need to help fund the sanctuary. Sorry, as a former president and now as the financial secretary developing the budget for our next fiscal year, funding CBI is always on my mind.

I have written and spoken about that concept on many occasions. While this week’s portion discusses the “tax” to support the sanctuary, that support can be provided by various means, including, financial support and human action support. By providing that support you are fulfilling the commandment. There are many ways to support CBI. The Nominations Committee has reached out asking members to step up and serve in leadership positions. During this period of ZOOM services, we are very fortunate that so many of you have stepped up to help lead services. As we move toward reopening the building, we will need people to assist in cleaning, setting up the sanctuary chairs, etc. We have begun a project to create a database of all the resources in the synagogue library, another great way to give back. Still

another way to work on the economic polarization is to donate to the Rabbi’s Discretionary Fund, which she uses to assist those in need. You can use any reason to give, a birth, a birthday, a thank you, a memorial remembrance, any reason. If you need one, today is Isabel Kaplan’s birthday. How wonderful it would be to donate to the discretionary fund in honor of Isabel and all she does, and will continue to do for OUR community.

What ever you do, by whatever means, know that by assisting and serving and offering to assist and serve YOU are making a difference and are on your way to providing help to fund the sanctuary written about in Chapter 27. I thank those of you who have stepped up, both in public and behind the scene, but there is always room for more to contribute.

This week’s Torah reading and study teach that we have a responsibility to close the gap in the economic classes in our society and to give *tz’dakah*. *Tz’dakah* helps to close that economic gap.

So what is the purpose of this convoluted talk? What is my takeaway? I ask you to do some self-reflection. What have you done to close the economic divide? Have you done all you can?

If you cannot afford financial support, are you using your talents to provide those in need by giving of yourself and your talents?

I have personally started a self-reflection and it is an amazing exercise. It has modified my priorities to know what is truly important to me and society. I ask you to do the same.

Thank you for your attention and thoughts and I hope you have seen the light bulb.

Shabbat Shalom,
Paul M Simon

Dinner with Rabbi Nebel

(Via ZOOM. Link will be forwarded that day.)

Thursday, June 24th at 6:00 PM

Then stay ZOOM-ed in
after dinner (6:30 PM)
for our ZOOM concert:

MUSIC FROM



Performed by our CBI musical stars!