



OPENINGS

In the Face of Terror: A Jew Hopes

Hopefulness is that palpable feeling that goodness is going to emerge in the world.

It's like warm bread. It not only fills us up, it feeds our contentment with day-to-day life. When it disintegrates, despair becomes our companion. We become depressed, immobilized, or worse.

But how are we to feel hopeful when the possibilities are so bleak, when the things we cherish are threatened, and when nagging fear has replaced what once seemed to be an indomitable security?

Is hope always accessible, even in the worst of times?

As Jews, our deepest source of hope is in the history of our people. That which is characteristically Jewish has enabled us to survive in the face of the most extraordinary challenges. Terror is nothing new to the Jews.

The oldest common historical root of our peoplehood is the liberation and exodus from Egypt, and the events at Sinai—*Mattan Torah*, the giving and receiving of the

law, the covenant between God and the "mixed multitude," through which we became Israelites.



For the first time, religiously prescribed behavior reflected not the fickle will of warring gods but eternal definitions of good and evil. The law, designed by the Creator, reflected uplifting or degrading consequences, which were revealed to the ordinary mind in the workings of creation.

Moreover, morality was never again an entirely private matter. The whole people accepted the covenant, so we became responsible for one another's observance and moral lapses. The covenant bound us together through our assumption of a common moral "yoke." No

longer would we be alone trying to find the path and to stay on it.

Liberation shattered the ancient view of social life, and made us responsible, in part, for our own hope. It was clear for the first time that all life did not exist in permanently fixed orbits. It was at last possible to conceive of human life uplifted for thousands, even millions.

This transformation of consciousness was the basis for all subsequent social and political movements—and a source of everlasting hope.

The Torah, then, is the *method* of hope, the teaching of principles and pathways that sustain hope.

One of those pathways, the ritual of Brit Milah, we encounter in one of our parshot (Torah portions) for this month, Lekh Lekha. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself along with all those in his household.

The *Brit Milah* (ritual circumcision) is an important source of hope.

(Continued on page 3.)

Save the Dates: November 2 & 16— Shabbat Evening Now Begins at 6:00 p.m.

Kehillat Kharakim will offer Friday evening egalitarian services and Shabbat dinners on November 2 and 16 at the home of Rabbi Moshe and Khulda.

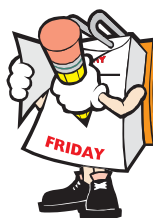
Services begin at a new time, 6:00 p.m., and include English and Hebrew prayers and singing.

After services there is a

blessing of the children and a sit-down dinner.

Dinner is followed by a readers' theatre Torah-drama, and zemirot (table songs).

Everyone



who comes is invited to bring a contribution to the tisch (table) in the form of a short story, a song, or a brief reading that's related to Shabbat generally or the Torah parsha (portion) for the week.

Call (323) 934-2925 for information, location, and to hold a place.

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Otzar—Treasure

Tefilin Shel Rosh (strapped on the head) consist of four separate בתיים compartments, whereas *Tefilin Shel Yad* [strapped on the hand] have only one בית [house]. We can learn from this that when it comes to theories and opinions של ראש [of the head], we may have different ones. But when it comes to action של יד [of the hand], we must all be united if we wish to construct an enduring בית [house]. —Tehiyat Yisrael

Torah Shmooze: Hospitality to the Stranger

Adonai appeared to him [Avraham] by the terebinths [Oaks] of Mamre, as he sat in the door of the tent in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw: and behold, three men stood by him; and when he saw, he ran to meet them from the door of the tent, and he bowed down to the earth, and said: My Lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, pass not away I pray you from your servant. Let now be fetched a little water, and wash your feet, and recline under the tree. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and stay you your heart; after that you shall pass on; forasmuch as you are come to your servant. And they said: so do as you have said.” (Genesis 18:1-5)

Our basic understanding of these verses is that Avraham saw three *men*, not three “angels,” because the angels—the messengers of God—were in human form. Avraham was recovering from his circumcision, but he showed kindness to strangers who entered the area of his encampment. He ran out to meet them instead of waiting for them to approach him. Although he was resident and they were transient, he bowed down to them and referred to himself as “your servant.” And although he offered his guests “a morsel of bread,” in the next two verses we learn that he asked Sarah to make cakes of fine meal and he had a calf killed and dressed for them.

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch teaches that God is apparent to us “only after an

[extraordinary] act of devotion, such as the mitzvah of circumcision Avraham had fulfilled. Hirsch adds: “It is not abstract contemplation, but fresh pulsating faithful-to-God active life that attains proximity to God” (18:2-3). Avraham was looking for travelers to whom he might offer hospitality in the heat of the day (Sforno). In the midst of a vision of God, he got up from his sick bed to welcome visitors. So the Sages said that welcoming guests is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence.

Or Hachayim also concludes that to Avraham the three angels “were apparently men,” but that he knew they were “sent to him for a specific purpose.” (One to heal



him, one to inform him that Sarah would have a son the next year, and one to tell

him of the destruction of Sodom.) First and foremost, however, they were sent to give him the opportunity to perform the mitzvah of hospitality.

Akeidat Yitzhak teaches that the incident with Avraham and the three angels comes “to illustrate Avraham’s behavior with *any* stranger, his loving kindness, personal involvement. . . .” The Talmud (Bava Metzvia 87a) teaches that “Such is the way of the

righteous; they promise little but perform much.”

The tradition extracts a number of lessons from these verses: We are obligated to visit the sick, because our visit may directly or indirectly affect whether an individual recovers or not. Every religious community is obligated to have a committee that visits the sick (*bikur holim*).

A person should actively seek to offer hospitality to guests. One should honor guests by “running” to greet them and serve them. Hospitality should include not only food and drink but also facilities for bathing and rest. A guest should not be made to feel that his or her presence is any imposition on the host. Taking care of the needs of guests is greater than prayer,

In this time of fear and insecurity in our communities, we are especially obligated to reach out and offer hospitality to those who are guests in our nation or who, even though citizens, are regarded as strangers.

Was it probable that Avraham’s guests would be like him and Sarah, or, if not, in what ways might they be different?

In what sense might we think of visitors to our kehilla as “angels,” possibly with a message from the Shechinah?

In what ways does our kehilla meet or fail to meet the obligations of offering hospitality to guests and visiting the sick?

How should we treat guests and new members of our kehilla?

For Young People: Finding Protected Places

Do you know the Hebrew name for the camel? It’s *gamal*, from the root letters גמל. The original meaning was probably to complete something. Maybe camels were given that name because they’ve been so useful to people, helping them to complete many things.

Can you think of how camels are useful?

They carry freight and people over long distances. They can sense when a sandstorm is coming and will hurry their pace to reach a protected place.

Their hair is made into wool for clothing and also used to make tents, saddle bags, and sandals. Their urine is used to make ammonia and their dung is used for fuel. Their milk and meat are edible.

But, wait a minute. Are camels kosher? Here’s a hint: they chew the cud and have a split hoof. But they’re *not* kosher because they have a cushion that covers the foot and hides the hoof.

It’s time for the camel quiz! 1. What are the two types of camels? 2. What’s the

most obvious difference between them? 3. How many miles can a loaded camel walk in a day? 4. How long can a camel travel without drinking water? 5. How can the camel go so long without water? 6. How much weight can a camel carry? 7. How can the camel walk on the hot desert sand?

The Midrash, our ancient rabbinic lore, teaches us that camels not only know how to find protected places for us in life but also when we die.

It’s written in the Midrash that a camel took the great prophet Hosea to his final resting place. He was in Babylon and asked that after his death his body be put on a camel and the animal be allowed to find its own way. Wherever the animal stopped, he was to be buried. He died, his body was loaded on a camel, and the animal made the trip to the land of Israel. It found its way to Safed and, coming upon the Jewish



cemetery, it stopped and stood still—which was where Hosea was buried.

And a camel also chose the burial place of Maimonides, the great rabbi of the 12th century. He lived and died in Egypt but he too was to be buried in the Holy Land. His body was put on a camel and also carried to the land of Israel. When the camel reached Tiberias it refused to go any farther—so Maimonides too was buried in a plot of ground chosen by a camel.

We easily accept the idea of camels finding protected places in life, but their finding protected burial places is very strange. However, our earliest rabbis had a proverb, a wise saying, about camels: “. . . a camel can dance on a bushel basket” (Yevamot 45a). Maybe this is to teach us that much more is possible in our protection than what we can imagine.

Answers to camel quiz: 1. Arabian and Bactrian. 2. Arabian has one hump, Bactrian has two humps. 3. Arabians, 100 miles. Bactrians, 30 miles. 4. Eight to ten days. 5. Special stomach for carrying water. 6. Nearly a half-ton. 7. Feet are covered with insulating sponge-like material.

In the Face of Terror: A Jew Hopes (con't.)

The circumcision itself is but a quickly passing moment of discomfort for the child, without meaning until much later in life. But to the parents and, to a lesser extent, family, friends, and congregational community, the ritual is a powerful and long lasting source of hope. (Much the same can be said of birth rituals for female babies, even though no cutting is involved.)

The power of the physical act, when connected with the religious ritual, cannot be experienced with indifference, especially by the parents. It makes them conscious of their newly acquired responsibility for the moral career of the human being that they have brought into the world. To a lesser extent, most of the family, friends, and congregation members who are present also feel some pull of responsibility for that career.

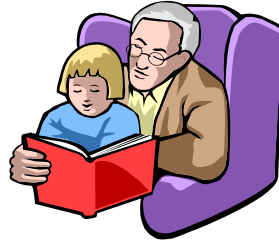
The new life is a source of hope in itself. Moreover, the commitment of other Jews to make this new life one that is dedicated to righteousness will, over the years, reinforce their own hopefulness with every contribution they make to the child's moral career.

Another of the Torah's pathways to hope we encounter weekly in the observance of Shabbat. Each Shabbat marks an incremental step toward our redemption and the coming of Days of Mashiach (messiah), for

which we share responsibility. Although we are commanded to "keep" and "guard" the Sabbath, possibly more important is the expression *la'asot*, that we are "to make" the Sabbath. It is not something that happens to us, but something that we make happen.

What we make happen is *gemilut hasadim*—loving kindness. Shabbat is a time when we learn how to be with those we love. It is a time to learn and teach that the world is not always a cold, cruel place, and that we are lovable and loved—a time of hopefulness.

And there is a link between the covenant, Shabbat, and Days of Mashiach. When the skeptics dismiss the possibility of Days of Mashiach, those who keep the Shabbat answer that they have already experienced it, if only for one day in the week. That experience is made possible through our covenantal learning and teaching that God and humanity can respond together in faith to complete the creation, to create a world in



which both justice and kindness prevail.

And every act of goodness that we do gives us greater hope that goodness will emerge in the world. Moreover, when we choose to associate with other people who are also creating goodness, avoiding people who are not, we further stimulate and reinforce our hopefulness.

How can we hope in a world full of terrorism, war, and violent crime?

We hope because we're not alone, because all of us together share these painful circumstances, and all of us together can help to bring Days of Mashiach (Messiah).

Of course there are no quick or simple solutions. It is said in *Midrash Rabbah* that "everything is bound up with waiting." The God with whom we covenant willingly shares with us the power of creation as co-producers of the world, but over decades and centuries, if not millennia.

R' Enoch Zundel ben Joseph of Bialistock (ca. 19th century) taught that when we suffer and struggle together, we hope with faith for relief. We hope to sanctify the Divine Name, to do an important act with our lives that praises God and goodness.

A Jew hopes because, even when waiting for goodness to reappear, the Jew joins with other Jews and refuses to give up learning and working to create a better world.

Holding Each Other: Blessings for Love-Making

There's probably no time in recent memory in which so many of us have felt such a compelling need to hold onto those we love. So it seems especially appropriate now to call down blessings upon our love-making.

In the spirit of the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* (*The Holy Letter*), which teaches that God "commanded us . . . saying we must sanctify ourselves at the time of intercourse . . ." we've developed our own *minhag* (custom) of blessings before and after love-making.

Our blessing before love-making acknowledges that God gives us the Torah as the path of life—it enables joy and fulfillment even in the worst of times—and consecrates us to live in the Divine Image. (The blessing itself is based on Psalm 136:7, Zechariah 12:1, Psalm 16:11, and Song of Songs 1:4 and 6:3.) Although we usually make the blessing in Hebrew, it may also be sung in English:

*Blessed are You, Adonai,
who made the great lights,
who forms the spirit,
of every woman and man.
You make me know the path of life,
in Your face is fullness of joy.*

*We will find that loving Your way
is more fragrant than wine,
that it is the right love,
I am my beloved's,
my beloved is mine.*



Our blessing after love-making is based on Micah 6:8. Through it we hope to strengthen our commitments to each other, to our *kehilla*, to *klal Yisrael*, and to the larger non-Jewish community—all of which we believe sustain the deepest forms of intimacy.

In effect, through the blessing we remind ourselves that our intimacy depends on how we act with one another as a couple and

how we act as a couple toward others. We believe that between us, justice requires equality and equity in our roles and responsibilities; we believe that in the world beyond us, justice requires our commitment to *kahal* and *tikkun olam*. We believe that between us, kindness requires forgiveness when we hurt or offend one another; we believe that in the world beyond us, kindness requires *tzadakah*, that we show compassion by treating others righteously. We believe that between us, modesty (or humility) requires that we are teachers and learners together; we believe that in the world beyond us, modesty requires that we become teachers and learners by initiating and accepting challenges.

Again, although we normally make the blessing in Hebrew, it may also be sung in English:

*One has told you human what is good,
what Adonai requires of you.
Only to love justice and do kindness,
and to go modestly with your God.*

(The Hebrew lyrics and recorded music for the blessings are available from R' Moshe & Khulda at nominal cost.)

OPENINGS

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Kehillat Kharakim

630 Hauser Blvd., #205
Los Angeles, CA 90036
(323) 934-2925/934-2913 (fax)

Rabbi Team

Rabbi Moshe ben Asher
Khulda bat Sarah

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על קהלת חרקים—ABOUT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM

- Kehillat Kharakim—a community of *openings*—meets twice-monthly for Shabbat services.
 - Kehillat Kharakim Friday-evening services regularly include a devar Torah (“sermon”) in the form of a readers’ theatre Torah-drama.
 - Kehillat Kharakim’s formation is being sponsored by Gather the People (GTP), a nonprofit organization founded by a Sponsor Committee of rabbis from virtually all the major branches and movements of Judaism.
 - Kehillat Kharakim’s rabbinic leadership is provided by Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah, formerly the “Rabbi Team” for Congregation Beth Israel of Chico, California.
 - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is to create a community of *openings*, or “kharakim,” through which family members of all ages can draw upon Judaism and congregational life to increase meaning and fulfillment in their own lives.
- The goal is a community that, regardless of where one begins or ends in Jewish knowledge or commitment, encourages greater exploration, acquisition, and expression of Judaism—and regardless of where one fits religiously, treats each person with kindness and respect.
 - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is that, apart from our capacity as individuals, we also have a role as a *kehilla*, a *community*. Following the example of Nehemiah, who gathered the people to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem, we assume that we too can reduce the pressures and realize the hopes that will uplift our families. By doing mitzvot *collectively*, we can bring about change for the good in our day to day lives.
 - Kehillat Kharakim is independent, not affiliated with any of the movements or branches of Judaism.
 - Kehillat Kharakim has the following kashrut policy: all food must be dairy or parve, unless special arrangements have been made, and must be prepared according to kosher guidelines; packaged goods must be certified as kosher; fresh baked goods must be purchased from kosher bakeries; and home-baked goods must contain only vegetable shortening. Non-kosher food shall not be served.

Kehillat Kharakim is a project of
Gather the People
A Nonprofit Education & Training Resource
for Congregational Community Development
<http://www.gatherthepeople.org>

PASTORAL COUNSELING AVAILABLE

Rabbi Moshe offers pastoral counseling without charge to any Kehillat Kharakim individual, couple, or family. Pastoral counseling addresses religious and spiritual as well as psychological and emotional needs. Moshe has a Ph.D. in Social Work, was a staff member of the Adirondack Samaritan Counseling Center of Glens Falls, NY, and was trained at the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Los Angeles. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information or an appointment.

TAX DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUPPORT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM SHOULD BE MADE TO “GATHER THE PEOPLE”

KEHILLAT KHARAKIM
630 Hauser Blvd., #205
Los Angeles, CA 90036

