

Israel Rabbinic High Holiday Seminar

July 27, 2021 – י"ח אב תשפ"א

1. Teshuva: Return to Zion

- Halachic - Rambam
- Mystical – Rav Kook
- Spiritual – Rabbi AJ Heschel
- Redemptive

A)

A song of ascents. When the LORD restores the fortunes of Zion —we see it as in a dream—	שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת בְּשׁוּב יְהוָה אֶת־שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֻלְמִים: (Psalms 126:1)
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B)

Israel – the Jewish State – is important not only as the place that guarantees political refuge; not only as the place where more *mitzvot* can be performed; not only as the place where given the high rate of assimilation and intermarriage in the exile our continuum as a Jewish people is assured. It is rather the place where we have the means to carry out our mandate. Only in a Jewish State do we have the political sovereignty and judicial autonomy to potentially establish a just and ethical society from which others can learn.

Of course, Jews living in the Diaspora can make significant individual contributions to the betterment of the world. And there are model Diaspora communities that impact powerfully on Am Yisrael and humanity. But I would insist that the national destiny of the Jewish people can only be realized in the land of Israel. Only there, as a nation, do we have the potential to contribute to repairing the larger world.

(Journey to Open Orthodoxy)

2. Teshuva: Turning Toward Each Other

A)

15. Thus said the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah— Wailing, bitter weeping— Rachel weeping for her	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע׃ נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל־
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<p>children. She refuses to be comforted For her children, who are gone.</p> <p>16. Thus said the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping, Your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labor —declares the LORD: They shall return from the enemy's land.</p> <p>17. And there is hope for your future —declares the LORD: Your children shall return to their country.</p> <p>18. I can hear Ephraim lamenting: You have chastised me, and I am chastised Like a calf that has not been broken. Receive me back, let me return, For You, O LORD, are my God...</p> <p>20. Truly, Ephraim is a dear son to Me, A child that is dandled! Whenever I have turned against him, My thoughts would dwell on him still. That is why My heart yearns for him; I will receive him back in love — declares the LORD.</p>	<p>בְּנֵיהָ מֵאַנְהָ לְהִנְחֵם עַל-בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנוּ: {ס}</p> <p>כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה מִנְעֵי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמְעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְּעֻלָּתְךָ נְאֻם-יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב:</p> <p>וַיִּשְׁתַּקְּוָה לְאַחֲרִיתְךָ נְאֻם-יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ בְנָיִם לְגְבוּלָם:</p> <p>שָׁמוּעַ שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶפְרַיִם מִתְנַוֵּד יִסְרַתְנִי וְאוֹסֵר כְּעֹגֵל לֹא לְמַד הַשְׁבִּנִי וְאַשׁוּבָה כִּי אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי: ...</p> <p>הֲבֵן יִקָּר לי אֶפְרַיִם אִם יֶלֶד שְׁעִשְׁעִים כִּי־מִדֵּי דְבָרֵי בוֹ זָכַר אֲזַכְרֶנּוּ עוֹד עַל-כֵּן הִמּוּ מֵעַי לוֹ רַחֵם אֲרַחֲמֶנּוּ נְאֻם-יְהוָה: {ס}</p>
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(Jeremiah 31:15-18, 20)

B)

While we dare not make light of our differences, even more important is that when we argue among ourselves, we do so as a family. We must be *machmir*, absolutely uncompromising, on the mitzvah of *ahavat Yisrael*, love of our fellow Jew. To achieve this while staying true to our individual principles, an ethics of dissent should be drafted:

- Language must be used with care. While a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds.
- Let's not impugn the motives of others. Each side should recognize that it has no monopoly on loving the land of Israel and seeking peace.
- Even in disagreement, it is important to recognize that we have much to learn from one another.
- It is vitally necessary that both sides call out the extremists on their respective fringes.
- No matter the extent of one's disagreement with Israel on pluralism and other issues, *ahavat Medinat Yisrael* requires total material and spiritual commitment to the state, which must remain unconditional.

(Journey to Open Orthodoxy)

3. Zocher Ha-Brit

A)

- Brit Avot Ve'Imahot (Genesis 15)
- Brit Sinai (Exodus 24)
- Brit Ha'aretz (Deuteronomy 29)

B) The Many Faces of Anti-Semitism

Not coincidentally, these three covenants, people, Torah, and land, comprise the basis of Jewish nationhood. It is in the words of Rabbi Kook a combination of the people of Israel with the Torah of Israel in the land of Israel. Throughout the centuries, there have been those who have been bent on destroying the Jewish nation, by attacking one of these three pillars.

Jewish People: Some – like Amalek in biblical times or the Nazis in the modern era – have focused their venom on the Jewish People. Their goal was to annihilate us.

Jewish Theology: Others have directed their hatred against our Torah. A prime example is Christian persecution of Jews in what historian Raul Hilberg calls “fifteen hundred years of anti-Semitic activities.” Their claim was that they had no intention to murder Jews. Rather, it was to kill those who rejected their primary belief. Basically, they stated, we accept Jews, but only if they embrace our theology. In the end, however, it became clear that their goal of destroying our fundamental Torah beliefs was the equivalent of destroying the Jewish People.

Jewish Land: Today another type of Jew hatred has emerged in the form of anti-Zionism. Truth be told, in the post-Holocaust era, it is still not considered polite to directly target Jews or even their Torah. Hence, the attack against the Jewish land. In the end, however, a Jewish land is so fundamental to Judaism that any attempt to deny Jews their homeland is nothing less than an attempted destruction of the Jewish People.

(Torat Ahavah)

4. No Fear

A)

<p>Of David. The LORD is my light and my help; whom should I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread?</p> <p>Look to the LORD; be strong and of good courage! O look to the LORD!</p>	<p>לְדָוִד יְהוָה אֹרֵי וְיִשְׁעֵי מִמִּי אֵיךָ יְהוָה מְעוֹדֵחַי מִמִּי אֶפְחָד: קִוּהָ אֶל־יְהוָה חֲזַק וַיֵּאֱמַץ לִבִּי וְקִוּהָ אֶל־ יְהוָה: {פ}</p>
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(Psalms 27:1, 14)

B)

<p>One who enters battle thinking he or she will not die is not an exalted hero.</p> <p>Just the same, one who gives charity but has no concern about money is not truly generous.</p> <p>Real greatness emerges when one acts contrary to her or his feelings.</p>	<p>מי שיכנס למלחמה לחשבו שלא ימות אינו גבור אמיתי. וכן מי שנדיב כי מבזה בממנו אינו נדבן רציני. גבור ונדיב הוא שפועל נגד רגשותיו.</p>
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(Based on Abrabanel to Genesis 32)

C)

<p>I am not a psychiatrist, but I know that there is one great fear that pushes away all the smaller fears. And what is that fear through which one can push away other fears like the fear of failure, of loss of money, of aging, of losing popularity, of sickness.</p> <p>This is the fear of the Holy One, Blessed-be-He. This is the meaning of the prayer service, "Allow, O Lord, Our God, Your fear to be upon all of humankind..."</p>	<p>אינני פסיכיאטר, אבל אני יודע כי פחד אחד גדול מגרש את כל הפחדים הקטנים. ואיזהו הפחד שיכול אדם לקבל עליו כדי שעל ידו יעקרו מקרבו כל הפחדים האחרים, כגון הפחד מפני הכשלון, מפני העוני, מפני הזיקנה, מפני חוסר-הפופולאריות או מפני המחלות. הוה אומר: הפחד מפני הקב"ה! ומכאן התפילה: "ובכן תן פחדך, ה' אלוקינו, על כל מעשיך..."</p>
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(Al HaTeshuva by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik)

D)

Demand for Ourselves No Less Than We Demand for Others

Speaking out for others carries relatively little risk and, moreover, brings the acclaim and approval of the larger community. But speaking out with equal intensity on behalf of our own interests touches upon our insecurities and heightened sensitivity to what others may think of us – insecurities and sensitivities that we, as Diaspora Jews, have acquired and absorbed over the years.

(Spiritual Activism)

5. Keeping the Dream Alive

A)

<p>He dipped his finger into the blood, and sprinkled the blood, with a count— one upper sprinkling and seven lower ones.</p> <p>Each time he sprinkled, he counted aloud. One, One and one; One and two; One and three; One and four; One and five; One and six; One and seven.</p>	<p>רְצוּי הַזֵּיוֹת טָבַל וְהִצְלִיף בְּמִנְיָן. רוּם מַעֲלָה אַחַת וּמַטָּה שִׁבְעָה:</p> <p>וְכֵן הָיָה מוֹנֵה. אַחַת. אַחַת וְאַחַת. אַחַת וּשְׁתַּיִם. אַחַת וְשָׁלֹשׁ. אַחַת וְאַרְבַּע. אַחַת וְחֲמִשָּׁה. אַחַת וְשֵׁשׁ. אַחַת וְשִׁבְעָה:</p>
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(Yom Kippur Avodah Service)

B)

How does one deal with dreams that have gone awry? The key is to recognize that there is a difference between dream and reality. Dream is the hope of a glorious, almost perfect future. Reality, by definition, includes disappointments.

The challenge, when reality and disappointment set in, is to never forget the dream. Once you forget the dream, it’s all over, because you won’t be able to handle the reality; only by keeping the dream alive can we survive the difficulties.

This is important relative to our personal lives. Built into dreams are disappointments – a marriage, health, a profession gone sour. But we’ll make it, if we keep dreaming. If you stop dreaming, you stop living.

So too relative to what’s happening in Israel. Israel is *reishit semichat ge’ulatenu* (the dream of the dawn of redemption). But once there, we face reality. There’s division, terrorist bombings...yet with all of these problems, Israel is a great country, as long as the dream is still in place.

(Torat Ahavah)

6. Final Thought and Story

A) Is Israel's Survival Guaranteed?

<p>4. The word of the LORD came to him in reply, "That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir."</p> <p>5. He took him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be."</p> <p>6. And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit.</p> <p>7. Then He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession."</p> <p>8. And he said, "O Lord GOD, how shall I know that I am to possess it?"</p>	<p>וְהִנֵּה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירָשֶׁךָ זֶה כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשֶׁךָ:</p> <p>וַיּוֹצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִבְטֵנָּא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכֵל לְסַפֵּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יְהִי זַרְעֶךָ:</p> <p>וְהֶאֱמַן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה:</p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לְתֵת לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:</p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּמָה אֲדַע כִּי אִירְשֶׁנָּה:</p>
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(Genesis 15:4-8)

B) Yearning for Israel (Doresh Tzion)

<p>Joseph was identified as a Hebrew, and was therefore buried in Israel.</p> <p>Moses was not identified as a Jew, and was therefore not buried in Israel.</p>	<p>יֹסֵף הוּדָה בְּאֶרְצוֹ וּלְכֵן נִקְבֵּר בְּאֶרְצוֹ</p> <p>מֹשֶׁה לֹא הוּדָה בְּאֶרְצוֹ וּלְכֵן לֹא נִקְבֵּר בְּאֶרְצוֹ</p>
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(Paraphrased from Devarim Rabbah 2:8)

<p>She is Zion, there is none who care for her" (Jeremiah 30:17). This verse teaches by inference that Jerusalem requires yearning.</p>	<p>צִיּוֹן הִיא דוֹרֵשׁ אֵין לָהּ מְכַלֵּל דְּבַעֲיָא דְרִשָּׁה</p>
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(Rosh Hashanah 30a)

C) Little Ido: In Memoriam

<p>To what can death be compared?</p> <p>To a person who enters a darkened room for the first time and trips over the furniture.</p> <p>Each time he enters the room,</p> <p>he learns more and more where the furniture stands.</p> <p>In time he becomes familiar with the room,</p> <p>and despite the darkness</p> <p>knows how to get around.</p> <p>So, too, death.</p> <p>There is darkness in death that cannot be chased away.</p> <p>But it is possible to learn how to continue to live</p> <p>despite the darkness which forever remains.</p>	<p>משל, למה הדבר דומה,</p> <p>לאדם שנכנס לתוך חדר חשוך ונתקל בכל מיני דברים שמפוזרים בתוך החדר.</p> <p>בכל פעם שנכנס לחדר</p> <p>הוא לומד יותר ויותר בדיוק איפה הדברים נמצאים.</p> <p>וכך נתקל בהם פחות ופחות,</p> <p>עד שאחרי זמן מה,</p> <p>הוא מכיר את המקום היטב</p> <p>ולא נתקל בשום דבר, למרות שהחדר עדיין חשוך.</p> <p>כמו כן המות</p> <p>יש חושך במות שאי אפשר לגרשו.</p> <p>אבל אפשר ללמוד איך להמשיך לחיות</p> <p>למרות החושך הזה .</p>
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