**Brooklyn torah gazette**

**For parshas ki savo 5780**

Volume 4, Issue 48 (Whole # 200) 16 Elul 5780/ September 5, 2020

**Printed L’illuy nishmas Nechama bas R’ Noach, a”h**

**Former NBA Star Amar’e Stoudemire Completes His Geirus, Is Now Yehoshafat Stoudemire**



**Yehoshafat *ben* Avrohom.**

 That’s Amar’e Stoudemire’s new name now that he has officially finished his *geirus*, or conversion to Judaism.

 The former NBA star, who received Israeli citizenship in March 2019 while playing professional basketball in Israel, announced today in a post on Instagram that his *geirus* is complete.

**Had His Final Meeting with the Bais Din**

 Amar’e had his final meeting with the *bais din* that performed his *geirus* and immersed in a *mikvah*.

****

**Member of the 2013 Knicks team**

 The 6-10 forward played for the New York Knicks and Phoenix Suns among other teams in a 16-year NBA career, during which he was named Rookie of the Year and made six All-Star teams. He also played for Hapoel Jerusalem from 2016 to 2019 and remains a part owner of the Israeli team.

 For the past couple of years, Amar’e has been a student at Yeshiva Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim, where he has learned *Gemara*, *halacha*, *hashkafah* and more.

 Stoudemire, who will be 38 this coming fall, was born and raised as a Baptist Christian. Today, he is a full-fledged religious Jew, *davening* every day and learning Torah.

**Began His Conversion Process in 2011 in New York**

 He began his conversion process in 2011 in New York. As a child, he was told by his mother that his ancestors were “Hebrews.”

 “Our forefathers had been sent to Africa; from there they went to America and when they were slaves, lost their religion,” he said in an interview. “It’s hard for me to say that I was surprised by her revelation. I didn’t see myself as a religious person, but I was always spiritual and that’s why things have proceeded nicely and prepared me for the process that I am undergoing today.”

 Amar’e has received *chizuk* from across the globe.

 “When I enter the *yeshiva* or synagogue, people still look at me in awe and say that I am doing a *kiddush Hashem*. But this is simply just me.”

 As for his name, he didn’t at first know who Yehoshafat was. “I began to learn, check and investigate and I found out that he was a King in the Kingdom of Yehuda and one that disseminated Torah. It’s a meaningful name.”

 Becoming closer to Judaism for Amar’e did not come from a crisis, he says.

 “It came from a combination of moments of memory and enlightenment, in which I realized that in life there is much more in the world than just being rich, parties and publicity.”

*Reprinted from the August 26, 2020 website of Matzav.com*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parshat Ki Tavo**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**

 I have in earlier years written about the strange requirement that the Torah imposes upon the Jewish farmer in the land of Israel when he brings his first crop of the year to Jerusalem as an offering in the Temple. However, I want to reiterate and expand on the matter once again in this short article because I believe it to be of vital and relevant importance to us in our times.

 The Jewish farmer, in a review of Jewish history, recounts as to how he arrived at bringing this offering to the temple. He relates the story of our forefathers, of Abraham and Jacob and of their struggles to survive in a very hostile environment.  He explains how the great and essential idea of monotheism, morality, charity, and godliness in human society was propagated. The one bringing the offering then recounts the fact that we have never had an easy road on which to travel. Our forefathers were enslaved in Egypt for centuries and sank to low levels of physical and spiritual standards. Yet, the Lord redeemed us and took us out from the house of bondage through miraculous events under the leadership of Moshe.

****

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

 We were granted the Torah and we were entrusted with the mission to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. We wandered in the desert for 40 years, sustained only by the will of heaven, and finally arrived in the land of Israel, a land promised to us through our forefathers by the God of Israel. And now, as a fulfillment of this drama of Jewish history, the farmer can bring these first crops of the year to Jerusalem, as an offering in the temple.

 There is an innate desire within all human beings to know about their past. At one time or another, all of us experience the feeling of *déjà vu*, about events and places that we know we have never been to before or have never experienced in this lifetime.

 It is this sense of history, of the past that imposes itself upon us. Unfortunately, most Jews in our time are completely unaware of their past. They have no idea as to their ancestry, traditions and the events that have led them to where they are and who they are today. In that ignorance lies the main cause for the alienation and disaffection of so many Jews as to their faith and future.

 They are overwhelmed by the present and fearful of the future simply because they are ignorant of their past. This engenders a feeling of panic and uncertainty that gnaws at the very vitals of their existence. This is especially true here in Israel, now almost 75 years after its creation and founding, the state is still taken for granted and has lost some of its luster. It is no longer treasured as it once was and should be.  To sanctify the mundane – to make even the produce of this country into a holy offering – knowledge and appreciation of the past is necessary. This is an important lesson that this week's reading imparts to us.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Ki Savo**

**Using Visualizations**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jewish people, “Today HASHEM has commanded you to fulfill all of the statues and laws*. . .” — Devarim 26:16

 Rashi is troubled by Moshe’s use of the word today, implying that HASHEM first commanded the Jews to do the mitzvahs that day when in reality, HASHEM gave the Jewish people the mitzvahs almost 40 years earlier.

 Rashi answers this question by explaining that Moshe was telling them that, “Every day, in your eyes, it should be as if you were commanded in them today.” In other words, there should be an excitement with which we do the mitzvahs, a freshness and new energy, as if this was the first time that we are hearing about them.

**How Can the Torah Expect it to Still be New?**

 This Rashi is difficult to understand because we know that for every experience, there is a first time. When something is new, it is original, exciting, and fresh, but that newness quickly fades; the excitement wanes. The value of the experience isn’t any less, but that certain crisp newness is gone. That is a reality of life. So how can the Torah expect the Jewish people to look at old mitzvahs as if they were given that day, when it just isn’t so? And how can the Torah expect me today, thousands of years after the mitzvahs were given, to view each mitzvah as if this is the very first time that I am fulfilling it?

 The answer to this question lies in understanding certain tools that HASHEM gave to man.

**The Power of Imagination**

 If you remember reading a well-written novel as a child, you may have found yourself somewhere you had never been before. You might have been brought to the 17th century as a pirate sailing the seven seas. There you were, out on the ocean with the buck and the sway of the waves, fighting off your enemy as he tried to board your ship.

 The sun glinting in your eyes, you pulled your sword from its scabbard, prepared for the battle. The enemy boarded your vessel; you dug your feet into the deck, tightening your fist on your sword, ready to pounce. And suddenly, your mother called you to dinner. Gone was the pirate ship, gone was the scabbard and sword, and rudely you were pulled back to reality.

 That is an example of imagination at work. Imagination is a powerful tool that HASHEM put into a person for a number of reasons. One of its functions is to make a scene, a time, or an event real. It can bring me to a different time, to a land I never saw, to an experience that I never had, and yet it is me right there. I feel it. I experience it.

 And in my mind’s eye, those events are actually happening to me. I may even have physiological reactions to the event; my heart rate will quicken, my blood pressure will increase, and my palms will begin sweating as I live that experience. If you have ever cried when you read a book even though you knew the events in it never happened, it is a classic example of this phenomenon.

**Using Visualizations**

 Imagination is also a tool that can help a person achieve success. Olympic athletes are trained to use visualizations. A diver will see himself standing high on the platform, the water glistening below. He is there in the stadium with the crowd cheering as he flawlessly performs his dive. He is living that experience in his mind, and it affects his performance later. He has already been there and done that.

 The results of using visualizations are powerful. Studies show that not only do athletes who use them improve, so do many other people whose activities require peak performance. From a salesman going on a new call to a surgeon performing a difficult operation, performance can be greatly increased by seeing the event happen successfully.

 This seems to be the answer for this Rashi. The Torah is telling us that a person can and should view the mitzvahs as if they are brand new, as if I heard about them for the very first time today. In my mind, I can feel that newness if I use this technique to visualize that I have first heard about them today. And this can bring freshness and a new energy to the manner in which I perform these mitzvahs.

 This concept is something that is very useful in our Avodas HASHEM.

More precious than fine gold

 Dovid Ha’Melech describes that, “The Torah is more precious to me than fine gold.” Chazal tell us that “a mere whiff of the World to Come is more pleasurable than all of the enjoyments of this world.” Could you imagine the impact it would have on your life if you actually felt that way? Could you imagine the effect it would have on your enthusiasm for the mitzvahs if for one minute you sensed that? The change in your life would be enormous.

 The problem is that I don’t feel that way. It’s not that I don’t want to; I just don’t. Granted mitzvahs are important, and I recognize their place, but to actually feel that they are more precious than gold and silver just isn’t real. But it can become real if I close my eyes and imagine a king’s treasure room, filled with chests and chests of gold coins, diamonds, sapphires, and pearls. . . and then I imagine that every time that I open a sefer to learn or daven appropriately, I am depositing another precious stone in my storehouse of fine gems.

 The Torah is teaching us that visualizations work, and we can use them. Our imagination is vivid and powerful. The key is to use it without letting it control us.

Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [*Shmuz on the Parsha book*](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).

**Thoughts that Count**

*The "Reproof Section"* (Deut. 28: 15-68)

 In truth, all the curses that are mentioned in this section are directed against the enemies of the Jewish people, as it states, "And G-d will place these curses upon your enemies and upon those who hate you." This prophecy will ultimately be fulfilled in the Messianic era, when G-d will cause "the spirit of impurity to depart from the earth." *(Ohr HaTorah)*

 *You will be mad from the sight of your eyes which you will see* (Deut. 28:34)

Coveting everything one sees is indeed a terrible curse, for it is the root cause of all the other punishments that are mentioned in this Torah portion, eventually leading to "you will be only oppressed and crushed always." *(Ohr HaTorah)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Savo 5755 edition of the L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**The Symbolic Connection of the Bikurim and the Jewish People**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 This week's Torah portion, Tavo, opens with the mitzva of bikurim -- first fruits. "You shall put it in a basket...and the priest will take the basket out of your hand."

 Closer study of the Torah's laws of bikurim reveals that the presentation of the basket (usually made out of wicker) to the kohen was an integral part of the mitzva itself.

 Interestingly, while the fruits that were brought were only the choicest (and only selected from the seven varieties with which the land of Israel is praised), the basket that was used for them was made of a common material.

**The Seeming ContradictionIn the Mitzva of Bikurim**

 This seeming contradiction in the mitzva of bikurim contains an allusion to the descent of the soul from the higher spheres and its incarnation in a physical body down below.

 The fruits of the bikurim are symbolic of the soul; the basket is the corporeal body. Handing the basket to the priest represents the purpose for which the soul made this drastic descent.

 In general, the first fruits are symbolic of the Jewish people; more specifically, of the G-dly soul as it exists Above, completely transcendent of the physical world.

 G-d's plan, however, is for this rarefied soul to become enclothed in a body, a coarse and lowly "vessel" which contains it, as it were.

**A Difficulty for the Soul to**

**Express its Connection with G-d**

 This vessel makes it difficult for the soul to express its connection with G-d, even to the point of obscuring its true mission in the world. Again, just as in the mitzva of bikurim, the holy and superior "fruit" is contained and even constrained within the confines of a simple and unpretentious "basket."

 Chasidut provides the reason for this, explaining that the descent of the soul into a physical body is a "descent for the purpose of ascent": It is precisely through its sojourn on the physical plane, having to confront the difficulties of this world and overcome them, that the essence of the soul is revealed and a higher level of spirituality attained -- much higher than could ever be reached without experiencing this descent in the first place.

**The Objective of the Soul’s Descent**

 In principle, "fruits" alone are not enough; the objective of the soul's descent is "fruits within a basket."

 The soul's ascent is accomplished through the performance of practical mitzvot, which can only be done with the help of the "vessel" -- the physical body. For in truth, the soul was already filled with love and awe of G-d before it came down into the material world; the only change it experiences upon finding itself in a body is that it can now do physical mitzvot, something that was previously impossible. Thus the soul is rendered capable of elevating the physical world and turning it into holiness -- the very intent of all of creation.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Savo 5755 edition of the L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Vol. 29*

**Making the Most of Elul**

**By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**



 These days we are dealing with a somersault of emotions. The summer is coming to a close and many of us say we can’t believe it’s already over. We are experiencing the blues of getting back to the city grind while, at the same time, we realize that we are in the month of Elul. And so, we have the chilling awareness that we are rapidly approaching the Yom HaDin, the Day of Judgment.

 I think that it’s important to first put Elul in its proper perspective. Rav Itzele Blazer, zt”l, zy”a, the great Baal Mussar, had the following practice. At the onset of Elul, he would go up to the Aron Kodesh, open up the paroches and give public thanks to Hashem for the great gift of Elul. This is the way we need to perceive Elul; not as a scary time but rather as a time of great opportunity.

 This period of the year of “Ani L’dodi V’dodi Li – I am to my Beloved [Hashem] as my Beloved is to me,” is the ultimate “matching” program. Hashem says, “In direct proportion to how you reach out this month to Me, I will be there for you and embrace you.” It’s the season when Hashem says, “I am there for you. Just make sure to make time for Me.”

 The special power of this season was created thousands of years ago when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Hashem on Rosh Chodesh Elul to petition Him to forgive the Bnei Yisroel for the sin of the golden calf. He successfully descended 40 days later on Yom Kippur with the happy news, “Vayomer Hashem ‘Salachti ki’dvorecha’ – I have forgiven you as you requested.” From that time on, the 40 days from Elul to Yom Kippur has been a time that is m’sugal, best suited for selicha v’kaporah, forgiveness and atonement. Thus, Elul has always been a time for making a cheshbon hanefesh, a personal accounting to determine which sins we need to avoid and which mitzvahs we need to improve upon.

 But, there is another aspect of Elul that we need to keep in mind. We know that as the Day of Judgment comes, we make hopeful commitments to be better at our relationships, more attentive in our devotions of prayer, more liberal with our tzedaka and more assiduous with our learning.

 But, as soon as Yom Kippur and Hoshanna Rabbah are behind us, these commitments all too often begin to fade. By the time Zos Chanukah comes around, many a time they are completely forgotten. The posuk tells us that Hashem looks at us, “Mei-reshis hashanhah ad achris hashannah,”

 Hashem looks at how we behave from the beginning of the year until the end of the year. The venerable Satmar Rebbe, zt”l, zy”a, says wittily that this is what it says in the Kedusha on Shabbos, “Hein go’alti eschem archaris k’reishis – I will redeem you when the end of the year is like the beginning of the year.”

 Elul therefore, as the last month of the year, is also a time to show Hashem that we are ending the year with the same hopes and aspirations that we had in the beginning of the year, putting our best foot forward before the Day of Judgment. As Chazal teach us, “Hakol holeich achar ha’chasom – Everything goes after the finale.” So regarding the year taf-shin-pei, 5780, a year that was truly difficult and challenging, let’s make the end of this year a strong and fruitful conclusion.

 One more idea. Everybody approaches Elul as a time of promise for the future. But, it is also an opportunity to look back at the past year and give thanks to Hashem. As we say in the first selichos of the season on motzei Shabbos before Rosh Hashannah, “Lishmoa el ha-rina v’el ha-tefilah – [Hashem should] Hear the song and the petition,” meaning that before our petitions for the future, we should sing about the past.

 The Nitra Rav, shlit”a says that anyone over 60 years old who survived the coronavirus scourge after Purim should really bentch gomel. If everyone is healthy and you’re able to pay your bills, and you’re of good peace of mind, the first thing you should be doing is singing to Hashem in songs of thanksgiving.

 When Hashem sees that we are appreciative, this is another good way to connect with our Beloved. In the merit of our Elul preparations, may Hashem bless us as Kasima v’chasima tova u’masuka, a sweet, healthy and wonderful New Year.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Seitzei email of the Jewish VUES.*

**Rabbi Aryeh Spero, a Longtime Right-Wing Republican, Blesses RNC and President Trump**



**In this screenshot from the RNC’s livestream of the 2020 Republican National Convention, Rabbi Aryeh Spero addresses the virtual convention on August 26, 2020. (Courtesy of the Committee on Arrangements for the 2020 Republican National Committee via Getty Images)**

 ([JTA](http://jta.org/)) — On the third night of the Republican convention, Aryeh Spero, an Orthodox rabbi with a long track record of right-wing Republican involvement, asked G-d to bless President Donald Trump.

 Spero, who bills himself as the first rabbi to have endorsed Ronald Reagan in 1979, said Trump “has stood up fearlessly against those who are corrupting the term social justice.”

**Involved in Far-Right Politics**

 Spero has long been involved in far-right politics, serving as [one of four chairs of Pat Buchanan’s third-party 2000 presidential bid](https://publicintegrity.org/politics/party-machines-lobbyists-and-special-interests-part-two/) and heading a series of organizations aimed at advancing a “Judeo-Christian outlook.” The [website](https://conferenceofjewishaffairs.org/) of the latest, the Conference of Jewish Affairs, showcases videos of Spero’s appearances on Fox News and lists an advisory council that includes a number of right-wing Jews, such as [a Massachusetts rabbi](https://jewishjournal.org/2016/11/10/speakers-draw-protests-at-stoughton-temple/) who was decried for inviting anti-Muslim advocates to speak at his synagogue and [an Israeli professor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordechai_Kedar) who said only the threat of having their mother raped would deter anti-Israel terrorists.

 During his speech Wednesday night, Spero invoked “our Judeo-Christian tradition.” He also offered a prayer that exalted Trump.

 “Father, we pray that this outlook in mindset, this form of government continues as has been our history, especially now, when to our horror, it is being challenged,” he said in the opening blessing. “And so we pray that G-d gives strength and health to our president, who has splendidly demonstrated daily determination to defend and maintain the G-d-given rights of our citizens as enshrined in our Constitution.”

**Defending President Trump**

 Spero said Trump “has stood up fearlessly against those who are corrupting the term social justice, so as to deny Americans their birthright,” adding, “May G-d protect him.” He appeared to be referring to protests across the United States against police violence and for racial equity that have at times turned violent; his speech came the day after a 17 year old militia enthusiast allegedly shot and killed two people protesting the police shooting of a Black man in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

 “We are compelled to resurrect and give rebirth, to our providential beginning to renew our present days with the exuberance of those founding days, perhaps, that is what is meant when we say, Make America Great Again,” he said, using the Trump campaign’s slogan. “We plan to vigilantly protect and tend the garden, so as to imbibe its blessing.”

*Reprinted from the August 26, 2020 dispatch of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.*

**More Thoughts that Count**

*And you shall go to the place which the L-rd your G-d will choose to place His name there* (Deut. 26:2)

 A Jew does not travel the face of the earth of his own volition; Divine Providence leads him from location to location for the sole purpose of "placing His name there" -- to sanctify the name of G-d in that particular place. *(Hayom Yom)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Savo 5755 edition of the L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman Discusses the Dangers of a World that is Changing**

**By Daniel Keren**

****

**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**

 The Independence Day Hakhel Event began with a timely lecture by Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, mora d’asra of the host shul who continued his series of shiurim on Divrei Hayomim Beis (The Book of Chronicles II) and the title of his talk was “The World Is Changing – Again.”

 He noted that Divrei Hayomim Beis focuses on the kings of Beis Dovid, the dynasty of King David and of course begins with an account of his most famous descendant – Shlomo Hamelech, King Solomon [who ruled for 40 years on his throne in Yerushalayim, Jerusalem.]

**The High Point of Shlomo’s Rulership**

 Rabbi Reisman noted that the high point of Shlomo’s rulership occurred only in the first decade of his kingship and related to his construction of the first Beis Hamikdosh (the Holy Temple in Jerusalem) that was to have the greatest influence on the Jewish people.

 In Divrei Hayomim Aleph, the First Book of Chronicles that highlights the legacy of Dovid Hamelech, we learn that King David who was not allowed by G-d to build the holy Sanctuary in Yerushalayim spent much effort in creating the designs for the construction of the Beis Hamikdosh (along with acquiring the expensive materials that would be needed for building the Temple) that his son Shlomo would be allowed to create.

 The Beis Hamikdosh [where the Shechina or Divine Presence would forever dwell] was ready for its inauguration or Chanukas Habayis in the month of Tishrei [as the entire nation was gathering for the oleh haregel or Biblically mandated pilgrimage for the festival of Sukkos.]

 In Perek Vav (Chapter Six) of Divrei Hayomim Beis, we learn of the special tefillah (prayer) of Shlomo that he recited at the Chanukas Habayis. Rabbi Reisman explained that the Beis Hamikdosh was very different from previous Sanctuaries for the Jewish people such as the Mishkan in the Midbar (Sinai Desert), or in the Holy Land at Shiloh, Nov Gibon or Gilgal. Those sanctuaries were all just temporary.

**Hashem’s Promise to Dwell in the Arafel**

 At the major Chanukas Habayis for the Beis Hamikdosh, Shlomo spoke to both Klal Yisroel and to G-d. “Then Shlomo said, ‘Hashem said that He would dwell in the arafel (thick cloud) where He is not seen. I have built a dwelling place for You (Hashem) a dwelling place forever.”

 Solomon realized that the understanding and comprehension of Hashem is almost impossible for the human intellect to achieve. By constructing this unique dwelling place for G-d, Shlomo had created a small opening of understanding where one a foundation or connection could be forged by a person wanting to connect to Hakodesh Baruch Hu forever.

 Indeed unlike the previous sanctuaries (the Mishkan, Shilo, Nov Givon or Gilgal) which served the spiritual needs of the Jews for limited periods of time, Shlomo’s construction of the Beis Hamikdosh was forever.

 Shlomo at the Chanukas Habayis praised Hakodesh Baruch Hu (the Holy One blessed be He) for the incredible zechus (merit) he had to make both Yerushalayim and the Har Habayis (Temple Mount) the spiritual center of the world where all subsequent prayers of the Jewish people thoughout the world, even today would be directed to.

**Spreading His Hands Towards Shomayim**

 In verse 12 of Chapter 6, King Solomon begins to pray at the Chanukas Habayis by standing before the altar of Hashem in front of the entire congregation of Israel, spreading out his hands. He then continued by kneeling again in front of the Jewish nation and again spreading his hands towards shomayim (the Heavens.)

 In this manner the king beseeches Hashem to keep His promise to His servant, Shlomo’s father Dovid that there shall not cease from him (Dovid) a man to sit in rulership on the throne of Israel.

 Solomon then pleads with G-d to always turn to the prayer of His servant (Shlomo) that “Your eyes be open toward this Temple day and night, to the place of which You said that You would place Your Name there…and may [You always] hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, which they shall pray in this place…may You hear and forgive.”

 Rabbi Reisman said that the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, 1816-1893) writes that there is an obligation for a Jew to daven (pray) [wherever he may be] towards that direction of the Sanctuary [that Shlomo built.]

 Not only did Shlomo Hamelech spread his hands towards shomayim twice, but we see earlier that Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) also spread out his hands upwards when praying to Hashem on behalf of the Jews fighting Amalek in the Midbar. Rabbi Reisman said that the act of raising one’s hands is an effective way of awakening oneself spiritually when davening to Hashem.

**Creating a Powerful Spiritual Connection to Hakodesh Baruch Hu**

 The act of raising one’s hands is not what achieves the desired benefits. Rather it is the idea that such an action demonstrates that the Jew is looking out towards shomayim (to our Father in Heaven) and that attitude thereby creates a powerful spiritual connection to Hakodesh Baruch Hu (the Holy One blessed be He.)

 Rabbi Reisman noted that it is interesting that we Ashkenazim don’t have this custom to lift our hands towards G-d with the exception on Yom Tov during Musaf service when the Kohanim recite Birkas Kohanim (the Priestly blessings.) Why don’t we Ashkenazim (Jews from Europe) have this custom to raise our hands towards shomayim throughout the rest of the year?

 Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his notes to the Shulchan Arush makes reference to the fact that we don’t raise our hands since it is something that the nations of the world have adapted. This made the raising of one’s hands in prayers have an entirely different meaning from the actions of Shlomo Hamelech and Moshe and thus we no longer have the practice of raising our hands high when praying. [This theological problem never occurred to our Sephardic brethren who lived in North Africa and the Middle East where the non-Jews did not have the practice of raising their hands towards the heavens.]

 Returning to the account of Divrei Hayomim Beis where King Solomon raised his hands towards the heavens at the Chanukas Habayis, Rabbi Reisman pointed out that Shlomo was the only descendant of King David to rule over all the 12 Tribes. Shortly after his death, in the first year [as later described in Perek Yud, Chapter 10 of Divrei Hayomim Beis] of the reign of Shlomo’s son Rechavam, the kingdom split into two, with Rechavam’s monarchy reduced to the two tribes of Yehuda and Binyomin and the other Ten Tribes under the rulership of Yerovam.

**Punished with the Breakup of His Kingdom**

 Rabbi Reisman asked why was Shlomo punished that shortly after his death his kingdom was split into two with his son Rechavam having the smaller kingdom? The answer was because Solomon married bas Paroah (the daughter of Pharoah of Egypt.) When did this occur? During the fourth year of Solomon’s reign. As a result a gezeirah (heavenly decree) was issued that the kingdom was to have been split for 36 years. What happened after 36 years that the Jewish kingdom was not reunited? Stay tuned to a future legal holiday Hakhel lecture on Divrei Hayomim Beis to find out that answer.

 But why did Shlomo marry the daughter of Pharoah? There is a special mitzvah that a gair Mitzri (an Egyptian convert to Judaism) cannot marry a native born Jew until the third dor (generation.) Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky explains that there was a legal loophole. Bas Paroah became a shifcha Cananis (a non-Jewish slave) and was then freed (which automatically made her 100% Jewish) at which point she lost her status as a Mitzri and Shlomo was technically able to marry her.

**Why Did Shlomo Want to Marry this High-Ranking Egyptian Woman**

 But why did Shlomo want to marry this high-ranking Egyptian women? Rabbi Reisman explained that he wanted to extend his spiritual influence everywhere. He wanted to change the world forever and make it a true malchus Hashem, a Kingdom of G-d. We find in his tefillah in Perek Vav of Divrei Hayomim Beis, that not only does King Solomon pray that his newly constructed Sanctuary become an eternal place of prayer for the Jewish people, but that “also a non-Jew who is not of your people Israel, but will come from a distant land, for Your great Name’s sake and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm, and [they] come to pray in this Temple – may You hear from heaven, the foundation of Your abode and act according to all that the non-Jew calls out to You, so that all the nations of the world may know Your Name, to fear You as [does] Your people Israel and to know Your Name is proclaimed upon this Temple that I have built.”

**Thousands of Japanese Tourists Making Pilgrimages to Israel**

 Today we find that this have come partially fulfilled and for example, one can see the many thousands of Japanese tourists who come on pilgrimages to Israel in order to pray at the Kosel (the Western Wall.)

 The point here, Rabbi Reisman said, is that in the world there are winds of change that take place. There are times in world history where a certain sense of values, a certain sense or right and wrong and a certain sense of what is important sweeps the human attitude.

 We live in a world where history is defined by the sweeping changes in human attitude from decade to decade and sometimes from century to century. It is hard to believe that at one time in the 1940s Yiddish was the language of secular Jews and that the Yiddish Theater in the Lower East Side was vibrant.

 Rabbi Reisman recalled his rebbe – Rav Avrohom Pam remembering how back in Europe when he attended for a year the Yeshiva in Slobodka in Lithuania, the dormitories of the famed makom hatorah were filled with maskillim who learned Torah during the day but were swept away by the non-religious Enlightenment movement.

 Jews were also driven away from Torah observance by a fascination in this country for Communism in the 1940s and 1950s. Even in Eretz Yisroel a majority of the Jews became secular in the early part of the last century because of their love for the equality promised by socialism.

**The Winds of Change in the World are Very Real**

 The changes in the world caused by the winds of change are very real. Shlomo wanted to create a positive change that would result in all of humanity coming to believe in a Creator, the uniqueness of Yerushalayim and it’s Temple and the concept of prayer. He wasn’t completely unsuccessful. Most of the world did indeed come to believe in the uniqueness of prayer to Yerushalayim.

 But Shlomo wasn’t able to completely change bas Paroah. She still retained some of her prior avoda zora (idol worship) practices. We have to wonder, Rabbi Reisman pondered, how many of us to some degree have similar non-Jewish beliefs as bas Paroah [based on our being influenced by the non-Jewish world around us.]

 Here we are being thrown into a world of constant change. Rabbi Reisman said that if you are of his age or even slightly younger, you grew up in a country (America) whose values closely mirrored that of the Torah. The secular world proudly declared it allegiance to Judeo-Christian values.

 And guess what? The winds are blowing and the times are changing. What was a value in the past is a crime today. What was normal in the past is strange today and what was looked upon as strange in the past is considered normal today.

 That is the world that we are living in today. Klal Yisroel (the Torah nation) is unique in the world in that we have never-changing [eternal] values. In the past we were looked down upon because we didn’t believe in a particular avoda zora (idol worship) such as that the sun was a deity.

**The World Did Not Embrace the Values of Shlomo**

 Today we live in a time of challenge to our [Torah] sense of right and wrong. The lesson of Shlomo Hamelech is that the world did not embrace our values. He bet everything on his hope to make the Beis Hamikdosh the spiritual center of the world and he lost everything. After his death, his kingdom split.

 Despite the obvious difficulties, Klal Yisroel excels in times like this. Not everybody of course. Those Jews who embraced the Haskalah, a Yiddish secular culture or the Communist cause have disappeared. Klal Yisroel finds its strength when its values are challenged. Ironically as the lesson of Shlomo points out, we are weakened when our values are embraced by the nations around us but in their own diluted ways.

 The lesson is that no, life doesn’t come easy. Today is not a time of Gan Eden or perfection. It is a time of being wary of the world around us. And if the non-Jews around us are raising their hands heavenward, it is a time for us not to do so anymore. When we don’t feel challenged, we imitate. Now that we feel challenged [by the winds of change] this impulse to imitate has lessened.

 A small aveira, sin or indiscretion of not immediately corrected; slowly builds into something bigger and more spiritually destructive. A person has to catch himself that first minute. Shlomo, unfortunately did not catch himself when he made that first mistake [early in reign] of marrying bas Paroah and as a result the consequences became a disaster.

**One Short Stop on a Very Long Journey**

 As we go into a new world in the aftermath of a terrible pandemic, we must understand that we are only visitors in this country. We are not residents. We are here temporarily. It is but one short stop on a very long journey.

 And that is the lesson. The dream of Shlomo Hamelech is still our dream to come to a time when the Beis Hamikdosh will stand proudly as a beacon of light to the entire world and to all humanity at a time when the winds of change and shifting values will be no more. Rather the stability of Torah and avoda (divine service to G-d) and yireh shomayim (fear of heaven) will be real. When challenged, Klal Yisroel will again rise to the occasion.

*Reprinted from the August 27, 2020 edition of the Flatbush Jewish Journal.*