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**Offline and in Synagogue: How Orthodox Jews Learned About Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s Death**

**By Shira Hanau**



**U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg speaks at an annual Women's History Month reception hosted by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi in the U.S. Capitol building on Capitol Hill in Washington, March 18, 2015. (Allison Shelley/Getty Images)**

 ([JTA](http://www.jta.org/)) – Shlomo Zuckier was walking out of his in-laws’ house Saturday morning to go to outdoor synagogue services when he saw the newspaper on the ground. Through the plastic bag, he could read the headline with the biggest story of the previous evening: Ruth Bader Ginsburg had died.

 Most Jews would have heard the news on Friday evening, not long after the 87-year-old Supreme Court justice passed away of complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer. Many Reform and Conservative synagogues addressed the news in their Zoom services Friday night or Saturday morning.

**For Orthodox Jews, the News Arrived Differently**

 But for Orthodox Jews the news arrived differently. Some, like Zuckier, a postdoctoral fellow in Jewish studies at McGill University, learned about it from the newspaper, the way one would have heard news of that sort in an earlier era. Others heard from fellow congregants or neighbors over the course of the holiday. And still others found out when they turned on their phones or checked the news online after the holiday ended Sunday evening, a full two days after the rest of the world.

 While for some Orthodox Jews, particularly those with more progressive politics, the news of Ginsburg’s passing added to the emotions of Rosh Hashanah, for many it was just another important news story but with less emotional heft. That’s partially because of the way they found out, separated from the online news cycle and social media reactions, and partially because of the way they see their Judaism.

 “The whole thing was surreal,” Zuckier said of seeing the news in the newspaper on Rosh Hashanah and later seeing the posts about Ginsburg’s death on social media after the holiday ended. “But for me it didn’t define my Rosh Hashanah. I had other things to focus on.”

 Zuckier said some of that comes down to the way Orthodox Jews see politics and religion.

**What Extent Politics is Central to Your Religion**

 “It’s not a right-versus-left thing,” he said. “I think it’s just to what extent you see politics as central to your religion.”

 While for Reform and Conservative Jews, the Judaism Ruth Bader Ginsburg embodied, with her focus on social justice over traditional practice or dogma, represents many of their dearest values. Even her appearance cut a familiar figure, reminiscent of many a Jewish grandmother.

 But for many Orthodox Jews, for whom traditional practice is a more central focus, the type of Judaism she represented is less resonant. While for Reform and Conservative Jews, Democratic politics are often viewed as consistent with the Jewish value of social justice, for Orthodox Jews, who have trended increasingly rightward politically over the past several years, the relationship between politics and religion is more complicated.

 And for haredi Orthodox Jews, many of whom do not consume popular cultural offerings like movies and documentaries, Ruth Bader Ginsburg never became the cultural icon she did in the rest of the liberal Jewish world, a status she only assumed there in recent years.

 “If a big rabbi had passed in the Orthodox world, that’s what we saw in the liberal Jewish world,” said Elad Nehorai, a politically progressive writer who has written extensively about politics in the Orthodox community.

**Many Orthodox Jews are Trending Increasingly Rightward Politically**

 And for many in the Orthodox community, which has trended increasingly rightward politically in recent years, Ginsburg’s politics were not the cause for celebration that they were for many Reform and Conservative Jews.

 Still, for some Orthodox Jews, particularly Modern Orthodox ones, her death was a serious blow.

 For Maharat Ruth Balinsky Friedman, a member of the clergy at Ohev Sholom – The National Synagogue in Washington, D.C., learning about the justice’s death right before Saturday morning services from a congregant left her feeling “deflated.” But she didn’t address it at services.

 “Our services were abbreviated,” she said, noting that her synagogue, like many Orthodox services, had shortened the service to minimize the amount of time people would be gathering in-person. Part of abbreviating the service was cutting out the sermons.

 But even if there had been a sermon, she said, addressing the news felt like the wrong fit during a High Holiday season that was already more emotional than a typical year. And with fewer people at services – and social distancing hampering the feasibility of side conversations in synagogue – many people would not have heard the news by the time services began.

**Too Tricky to Deal with in Shul**

 “I think it would be too tricky to deal with in shul and I knew some people would be hearing it for the first time,” said Friedman.

 For Nehorai, who lives in California, hearing the news before the holiday began on the West Coast left him feeling “gutted.” But after the holiday ended, he said, he was glad he had heard about it before beginning Rosh Hashanah.

 “All Jews have had this horrible experience where we come out of a Shabbos or yontif [holiday] where we find out about something…Yom Kippur last year was when we found out about the shooting in Germany,” Nehorai said of the attempted shooting at a synagogue in Halle, Germany.

 “I think we’re in this age when it’s very hard to process grief and trauma because so much of it is so online so we’re constantly reacting,” he said. “It was really helpful to have two days of none of that.”

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**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Ha’Azinu**

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 Moshe appeals to Heaven and earth to somehow hear his words and bear testimony to the accuracy of his prophecies. Nature does not have a will of its own, but, rather, is bound by the original directions and system created by G-d when the universe came into being. Unlike human beings who possess free will and can make choices even when those choices are against their own self-interest, nature is unchanging in its acceptance of the will and pattern of its creator.

 As a matter of eternal persistence and unending discipline, Moshe calls Heaven and earth – nature itself – to be the witnesses to the covenant between G-d and Israel, a covenant that will span and survive all centuries of human existence. As nature is unchanging, albeit unpredictable, so too is this covenant between G-d and Israel: a covenant that is unchanging and unending, even though it has always been unpredictable in its execution and historical perspective.

 Though the Jewish people live and survive as an eternal people, in every generation, indeed even every decade, the Jewish nation must chart its own course and make its own decisions regarding its contribution to the perpetuation of the eternal covenant with G-d.

**Only Loyalty to the Covenant Can Guarantee**

**Our Eternal Relationship with G-d**

 There is no set formula or procedure guaranteed to achieve this end, except for loyalty to the covenant and that implies the rule of Torah and the implementation of traditional Jewish values in the life and society of every generation.

 Moshe, who is the master prophet of all time, sees and realizes the tortuous road that lies ahead for the Jewish people through the millennia. He is sensitive to the fact that there will be times and generations when the people will make a wrong choice and take a painful detour away from the main highway that the Lord has ordained for them. He cautions that we should not be disheartened nor discouraged by mistakes, negligence or even malfeasance.

 Such is the nature of human beings, and we are not in any way exempt from general human nature and behavioral patterns. But Moshe points out that there will always be the realization amongst the people of Israel that despite taking a wrong direction, we are completely capable of returning to the path that will lead us to the goal of being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

**The Need to Pay Attention to What**

**Was Said Thousands of Years Ago**

 Additionally, in all the events that have occurred, past and present, we can recognize where we have gone wrong and where we can restore ourselves to a correct path and a brighter future. Thus, when Moshe asks Heaven and earth to listen, so to speak, to his words, he is really asking us to pay attention to what he said thousands of years ago. For these are words that are wise and relevant, important and necessary for our times as well. It is no accident that this Torah portion is read and heard on the Sabbath of repentance preceding the holy day of Yom Kippur.

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

**Parshas Ha’azinu**

**The Gym and the Spa Moshol**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent — and it deserted HASHEM, its Maker.*” – Devarim 32:15

 In Parshas Ha’azinu, Moshe Rabbeinu prophetically forewarned the Jewish people about what the future would bring. One of his statements was: “Yeshurun, you became fat and kicked.” The Siforno explains that this was an admonition directed to the Torah scholars.

 He says, “You lost your ability to understand the finer points of Torah scholarship. What brought this on? You turned to the physical pleasures. Because you involved yourself in material enjoyments, you lost your ability to perceive the truth. When this happened, you rebelled against HASHEM, and then dragged the rest of the nation down.” The Siforno explains this is the meaning of, “ You became fat and kicked”.

**What’s wrong with a little pleasure?**

This Siforno is very difficult to understand. We know that HASHEM created many and varied pleasures in this world — each to be enjoyed in the right time and in the right measure. Pleasures and enjoyment have their place; they are tools to be used. So what is wrong with the talmidei chachamim of the generation taking a little bit of enjoyment form this world? And how does that drag down the rest of the people?

**This question is best answered with a moshol.**

**The Gym and the Spa**



 Imagine that you are invited to a very exclusive health club. You’ve never been there before, but you know the layout. On the left side is the spa, and on the right side is the gym. The spa is the area with the steam room, the sauna, the massage tables. It is the place where people relax. The gym is the area with the exercise equipment: weights, treadmills, elliptical machines. It is the place where people work out. They push themselves, they strain, and they challenge their bodies to the limits of endurance.

 As this is your first day in the health club, you decide you need a little break, so you go right to the spa —but by mistake you turn right and end up in the gym. “What?! What’s with all the red-faced people, grunting and sweating? What’s with all the hard work? I thought this was the place to chill, to loosen up, to enjoy?”

 This is a very apt moshol for our existence. HASHEM created two worlds: this world and the World to Come. This world has its purpose; it has been ideally fashioned to allow man to grow. All of the challenges and situations that we are confronted with here are custom-made to give us the opportunity to choose, and the results of those choices become who we will be forever.

 The World to Come has its purpose, too. HASHEM created it specifically as a place for man to have pleasure and enjoyment. When we leave this short existence that we call life, we live in that world forever and enjoy the fruits of our labors. Whatever level of perfection that we have reached during our few short years here, we will enjoy there for eternity. This world is the gym, the place of growth. The World to Come is the spa, the place that we enjoy our accomplishments.

**A person should enjoy this world**

 The greatest enjoyment in the human experience is growth. That is the reason we were put here, and there is a deep satisfaction that a person feels when he grows. If a person understands the purpose of life and is growing, he leads a deeply satisfying, fulfilling life. He has no need for outside stimuli to fill a void, and as such, he doesn’t have needs for luxuries and material indulgences.

 People who run after material pleasures are empty. A person who lacks meaning in life feels a void and needs to fill it with whatever will make him feel good for the moment. But it never works. Much like a person who hasn’t eaten in days and who tries to quell his hunger pangs by drinking water — twenty minute later, he’ll be hungrier than before. None of the pleasures of this world fill a person’s soul.

 This seems to be the answer to the Siforno. The Torah sages should be the happiest people in the world. They are constantly growing, constantly accomplishing. They are changing themselves and the world they live in. How can they not be satisfied? How can they feel lacking?

 If this group turns to material pleasures, it is indicative that something is missing. It means that their focus is off. They have mixed up the “gym” with the “spa,” and they aren’t laboring as intensely in Torah study. Therefore, the Torah isn’t fulfilling them. Because they are too focused on this world, a further downward spiral begins that causes them not to appreciate Torah as much and not to labor as hard in it.

 Then they will feel even more lacking and will need to fill that emptiness with physical pleasures. Eventually, this path will cause them to rebel against HASHEM and corrupt the rest of the generation along with them. Moshe Rabbeinu was warning them that their spiritual level and the rest of the nations depend upon their keeping their focus, ever remembering why HASHEM created them.

*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/).*

**How Do I get Over the Loss of My Dog (Who was My Best Friend)?**



 **Moran asks:** “It’s well known that the animals most people raise at home are dogs. They get very attached to them as in Hebrew the word dog is ‘celev’ meaning ‘culo lev’, he’s all heart. Someone who has a dog at home for a few years grows very attached to it, he feels the dog loves him sometimes more than people do. So my question is how do I get over the loss of my dog when I know how much he loved me and now he died leaving a void? My next question related to this is why don’t animals have a continued life in the next world like we do?”

 **Answer:**

 Moran Shalom to you,

 Thank you for your question. I share in your pain but you should bear in mind that this pain is an important lesson for your soul reminding you that our existence in this world is only temporary and transient, so one should invest his life’s efforts in eternal values.

**The Best Healer is Time**

 As far as getting over the pain the best healer is time. Every creature or item someone has for a long time makes a person feel attached to it. The item or in your case the dog created a long set of memories and experiences in your life and losing it creates a feeling of loss when it occurs mainly because we got used to it and feel its lack now that it’s gone. Therefore only time can heal this feeling of great loss that you’re presently experiencing. Investing in activities that create new memories can also help.

 That being said, it’s worthwhile for you to understand that your emotional attachment is based to a large extent on the common practice we engage in ‘humanizing’ our pets. I imagine that to a certain extent you feel as if you lost a close relative not just a pet. This humanizing makes your loss heavier in your heart.

 When we see a dog or a cat and try to understand how they feel and experience the world we automatically imagine ourselves in its body moving with its motions and actions. This is the only experience we can dream up based on our life’s experiences. We have no other way to imagine what really is going on inside them. People have difficulty understanding that inside of an animal is an entirely different system and method of experiencing the world around them than what we’re familiar with. It lacks free choice. Concepts like compassion or cruelty don’t at all exist in their world. Animals function as the creator programmed them to do and feel as G-d enabled them to feel.

**Animals Function According to the Laws of Nature**

 Animals are creatures that function according to the laws of nature without a true understanding of their lives or the ‘choices’ they make. Thus they are not any different than the world around them; they are part of nature itself and not something separate from it.

 A zebra getting attacked and killed by a lion doesn’t ask itself ‘why is this happening to me?’ It doesn’t have free thinking in its brain. It lives according to an established pattern and is getting torn up by the lion right now just as he ate some grass a few minutes before. The zebra may feel pain but doesn’t think about the pain. Since it has no independent thoughts of its own or free choice it’s really an integral part of its surrounding natural habitat.

 Therefore animals don’t think and feel in the same manner we do. It’s a well-known scientific fact that animals behave according to their inborn instincts. This is why a cat will never be as loyal to its master as a dog and a dog will make and not cover it up like a cat does. These are inborn behaviors established when they were created and they no choice but to behave within their inborn behaviors.

**Instinct Establish the Animal’s Way of Life**

 These instincts establish their whole way of life and their behaviors from the moment they are born to the moment they die. Ants never went to school to learn how to go in a straight line or to protect their queen. An ant knows its job from the moment it hatched, how to build the nest, how to protect the queen or look after the eggs or gather food for the winter. They function without any individual thought.

 Wildlife research has shown that migrating birds can fly all the way to Finland though they didn’t know how to fly beforehand and never saw it and they could fly there even with their eyes closed. In other words they have an inborn map and navigating instinct inside them.

 Salmon go upstream into inland streams to lay their eggs and die there. They fulfill their job from the moment they’re hatched until they die automatically without any thoughts or fear of dying. This is the way the Creator made His creations with inborn laws and instincts which also explains what we perceive as love and loyalty.

 A cat worried about her kittens can starve herself to feed them to the point of self-sacrifice but are you aware that a short 5 months later she ‘couldn’t care less’ about them and might even fight with them for some food? The cat automatically ‘loves’ its young at a given time and automatically stopped loving them at a certain time later. She can even mate with her offspring as if they were total strangers as this can increase the ability for their species to survive in nature.

**The Dog is Programmed by G-d to Love You**

 Now you may be able to understand that when a dog ‘loves’ you he doesn’t really choose to love you and doesn’t decide to what extent he will ‘love’ you. He is programmed by G-d to ‘love’ in a predictable and established way. Since this trait is in their DNA, all dogs will love their masters in a similar way. Your dog could have ‘loved’ someone else who gives it food and takes care of it in exactly the same way it ‘loved’ you. His love is in his nature and not by his own free choice.   Thus is why people are able to train animals, since they don’t have free choice they can be trained.

 Scientifically speaking, the dog’s instinct for loyalty comes from the pack behavior of wolves and dogs out in the wild. All the dogs instinctively listen to and protect the strongest alpha male which leads them and even decides how much food each dog will receive from the spoils of their hunt. No dog will go near the food until the alpha male allows them to.

 You may have noticed what happens when you put your hand next to your dog’s plate or his dog house. He may growl threateningly or even attack his master because of his territorial instincts. A dog that gets to do what it wants will be spoiled and bark threateningly at his master in these instances. It doesn’t consider his master an alpha male. But if the dog gets disciplining he will fall into line and recognize the authority of his master and stop barking at him.

**Dogs Don’t Naturally Love People**

 There’s a saying that “a dog is a man’s best friend.” But the truth must be told, dogs don’t naturally love people. That’s why dogs bark at people they aren’t familiar with who approach their master’s house; it’s their territorial instinct. He loves the members of ‘his pack’ meaning family members but not from a true human love for you. You may imagine that he loves you more than a stranger but this is humanizing his instinct. His loyalty and his happiness in your company is something you think is his loving you back just as two people love each other. But a dog does this out of instinct and not from true human type of love.

 As humans we decide how much to love or hold back from loving someone and how much we’re willing to sacrifice out of love for someone. A man can choose to love his wife and sacrifice for her though he may feel emotionally weak at the time. A couple can rekindle their love for one another and maintain it through deeds, compliments and a lot of compromise. A mother can love her child and expend great efforts for him though she may be furious with him. A man can be faithful to his friend or turn his back on him.

 Love is a great power that every human can use for good or for bad and we have control over it. We can decide to distance ourselves emotionally from someone or choose to love them and help them. That is why the Torah commands us: “Don’t hate your brother in your heart… Don’t take revenge or bear a grudge against your nation Love your fellow friend as you love yourself, I am G-d, (Leviticus 19, 17-18).”

**An Animal Can’t Be Commanded to Keep a Mitzvah**

 These concepts depend on us and we control our actions. It’s obvious that you can’t command an animal to keep a mitzvah like loving his neighbor for their love or hate solely depend on their involuntary instinct with no way for them understand the difference between bad and good and change their ways.

 Only a man can love someone he hates, break his character traits and be kind to him and even increase love and unity in the nation of Israel. Therefore a man’s love will always be far greater than an animal’s love. For the animal’s love depends on his instinct and is involuntary whereas man’s love depends on his will and ability to give or take. A man can truly give since he has the awareness of what giving and taking is and he can choose whether to give or to take. A dog’s conduct stems from his instinct and he has no idea why he does what he does, he just does it.

 All this will not help you forget your pain but it will help you get a perspective on it and give it proportion.

 In our next letter we will discuss and expand on your question why animals don’t have a portion in the world to come.

*Reprinted from the website of Hidabroot.com*

**Insights of a Determined Jewish Woman**

**By Daniel Keren**

(“*Chutzpah, Wisdom and Wine: The Journey of an Unstoppable Woman*” by Jodi Samuels, 2020, Emek Valley Press, paperback, 299 pages)



 Jodi Samuels a major personality in the world of Kiruv (helping to bring assimilated and secularized Jews closer to a Torah lifestyle) has just published her own fascinating journey from a secular childhood in South Africa. She has many very interesting stories, more so than most people as she has organized thousands of kiruv events and come into contact with many unique personalities.

 There are many themes in “*Chutzpah, Wisdom and Wine*.” There is the basic story of how Ms. Samuel an Orthodox feminist became committed to a Torah lifestyle. Then there is the story of how the self-confessed workaholic has become a prominent entrepreneur and creator of start-up companies, although at the price of sacrificing normal sleep.

 A third theme in Ms. Samuel’s account revolves around how she and her husband Gavin and her two oldest children changed their lifestyle to handle the challenge of giving as normal a lifestyle as possible to the youngest child – Caila – who was born with down syndrome. And the fourth story in “*Chutzpah, Wisdom and Wine*” was an account of her Aliyah to Israel and the difficulties she encountered in trying to fit in to the unique Israel lifestyle, despite her having transitioned from South Africa to Australia and to Manhattan on her way to Jerusalem.

**This Book is Not for Every Orthodox Jew**

 This book – “*Chutzpah, Wisdom and Wine*” is not for every Orthodox Jew. The author terms herself as a Modern Orthodox Jew and there are chapters that simply are not appropriate for more right-wing Orthodox Jews. In some cases the language is for such Jews quite inappropriate. And some of the chapters in which she relates how she accomplished feats while being loyal to Torah precepts might just not be appreciated by ultra-Orthodox Jews such as her account of how she and her husband handled a wedding invitation by a non-Jew on a Saturday afternoon.

 Also some of the pages are not what you might want your teenage children to read. This book on the other hand might be the perfect book to give to a secular Jew to read as that might convey that one can somehow connect a life closer to Torah values while still being able to enjoy certain aspects of the culture of Western Civilization.

 Ms. Samuels has a lot of interesting and at time humorous tales to tell. The chapter of her kiruv work can inspire all of us to make a greater effort to reach out to family, work colleagues and neighbors we know who are woefully ignorant of their precious Jewish heritage.

 When she married her husband, they were both beginning baalei teshuvah (secular Jews becoming committed to a Torah lifestyle.) Her husband had just graduated from medical school and they moved to the isolated outback region of Australia.

**Life Mission Changed by an Encounter with Chava Fachler, a”H**

 Before her marriage, she had been during her gap year enrolled at Bar-Ilan University in Bnei Brak just in time for Suddam Hussein to threaten and start firing scud missiles at Israel. Her mother arranged for her to take a plane to London where she was hosted by a legendary Chava Fachler, a’h, who along with her husband Eli had an open home for Jews in need of a Shabbos meal, or even a place to stay.

 Mrs. Fachler so impressed Ms. Samuels that she decided and her husband sagreed to always have an open home where any Jew also in need of a place to sleep or a meal to eat could be welcomed. That hospitality began when they lived in Australia and continued with their move to Manhattan and now in Jerusalem.



 **Mrs. Chava Fachler, a”h**

 Realizing that out-of-towners are often at risk of losing their Judaism, Ms. Samuels started an organization – the Jewish International Connection New York (JICNY) that has in almost two decades helped tens of thousands of Jews across all aspects of religious observance become stronger in their commitment to Yiddishkeit. More than 100 couples who later married first met their spouses at a JICNY event.

 Perhaps the most heartfelt segment of “*Chutzpah, Wisdom and Wine*” is the at times very painful efforts and setbacks that Jodi and her husband Gavin suffered in their commitment to give their daughter Caila the opportunity to live a normal life and the humiliating rejections from many Jewish schools.

 In conclusion, I have mixed feelings about this book. It is not for right-wing Orthodox Jews. It should be appreciated by Modern Orthodox and even secular Jews with a great fondness for Western culture. I also feel that perhaps the memoirs of her fascinating journey has been written too early. I would like to know how her children when they are grown up and are living on their old turn out. Maybe the author will in another 20 years come out with a follow-up volume and let us know how her grandchildren are still on the same page as she and her husband are. Of course she herself may have evolved in a different direction.

 “*Chutzpah, Wisdom and Wine: The Journey of an Unstoppable Woman*” by Jodi Samuels should be found in both Jewish and general bookstores, as well as on online websites such as Amazon.

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