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This means, if one doesn't provide food to those who need it, he is held responsible for everything wrong that happens due to this error.

**Rabbi Yosef Viener Explains**

**The Importance of Living**

**With Emunah in Hashem**

**By Daniel Keren**



One of the highlighted speakers at last week’s Flatbush Hakhel Thanksgiving Day Yarchei Kallah that was heard and seen around the world in conjunction with Torahanytime and Chazaq was Rabbi Yosef Viener, mora d’asra of K’hal Sha’ar HaShomayim in Monsey. The topic of his lecture was “Our Habits, Thoughts and Expressions: Change, Refinement and Reinforcement.”

Rabbi Viener noted that the Gemara Makkos records how Chazal (our Sages of blessed memory) wanted to define that Taryag Mizvos (the 613 Torah mitzvahs listed in the Chumash [Five Books of Moses]). It concluded by coming down to the inspiring words of the Prophet Habakuk – “that man must live through our emunah (faith) [and bitachon/trust in Hashem.]

Yaakov Avinu in Parshas Vayeitzei put some stones around his head before going to sleep on Mount Moriah and having the famous dream vision of a ladder grounded on earth and going towards the heavens with angels climbing and descending. One might wonder, Rabbi Viener asked, just how were those simple stones going to effectively protect Yaakov.

**Would That Stop a Lion?**

Would a lion have any difficulty in just simply jumping over those stones and attack Yaakov? Yaakov understood that Hashem wanted him to be in that place (Mount Moriah) and in that time. Therefore, our forefather Yaakov was confident that all he had to do was the minimum hishtadlus (human effort) by placing the simple stones around his head.

Rabbi Viener said that we all have to strive to develop the bitachon (trust) that Hashem gives you the abilities to fulfill all of the mitzvos that we are commanded to fulfill. Hashem will and always will give you what you need to accomplish His mitzvos. If you try to perform a mitzvah and it doesn’t work out, than a Jew with bitachon will realize that Hashem wasn’t expecting that achievement from you and your inability to perform that mitzvah is not in itself bad.

Nachum Ish Gamzu L’Tova was famous for whenever things turned out seemingly “bad” for him personally to declare “gamzu l’tova/this is also for good.” On a similar level, Rabbi Akiva would commonly declare in Aramaic (the common language of the Jews at that time) “Kol man d’avid Rachman l’tav avid/All that the Merciful One does, He does for good.” Both these beliefs of Nachum Ish Gamzu and Rabbi Akiva are stirring examples that we today should strive for in living our lives based on emunah and bitachon in Hashem.

**Asking the Malach (Angel) for His Name**

Rabbi Viener spoke of when Yaakov was attacked [in Parshas Vayishlach] by the angel of Eisav. He asked the malach for his name. Yaakov thought that this attack by the angel must have come about as a result of some aveira (sin) he must have committed. Therefore he wanted to know the angel’s name as that would allow him to realize his spiritual failing and how he could remedy it.

The malach answered that his name was irrelevant. That his attack [was coordinated by Hashem] as a precious opportunity for Yaakov to fight back against the Yetzer Hora (man’s evil inclination) that was symbolized by the angel of Eisav, thereby creating valuable and powerful DNA for his descendants and Klal Yisroel to benefit throughout our long history.

One of the important lessons to learn from Rochel’s giving over in Parshas Vayeitzei of the secrets to Leah that Yaakov entrusted to her [trying to avoid just the deception of Lavan, his father-in-law that occurred] was that Rochel could not have known that she would become the second wife of the man she loved and whom she hoped so much to help create the Jewish nation.

For all practicality Rochel’s noble mitzvah of saving her sister from being embarrassed was a seemingly permanent elimination (99%) of her chance to marry Yaakov. Yet her desire to avoid the humiliation of her sister Leah, another tzelem Elokim (precious creation of a human being made in the image of G-d) overruled Rochel’s great desire to marry Yaakov.

Rabbi Viener concluded his lecture with an account of someone, a wealthy frum Jew who recently discussed with him the merits of a potential business opportunity. In the course of their discussion, the businessman mentioned a conflict that he had. He confessed that he would like to daven (pray) a longer and more meaningful Shemonah Esrai and study longer in the Beis Hamedrash. But that would take time from his work and after all time is money. What should he do to resolve this dilemma?

Rabbi Viener said that this man happened to mention that his wife frequently said to him that she doesn’t recall every reading anywhere [in Tanach, the Talmud or the Code of Jewish Laws] that one is obligated to leave as a yerusha (inheritance) of $4 million dollars to every child. Rabbi Viener told the man that he was lucky to have such a wife. We should all have more emunah and bitachon in Hashem that just as he supported us, He can also support our children and grandchildren in the future.

*Reprinted from the December 4, 2020 edition of The Jewish Connection.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Vayishlach 5781**

One of the more perplexing questions that is raised in this week's Torah reading is why Yaakov sends agents and messengers to Eisav to inform his brother of his return to the land of Israel. King Solomon in Proverbs had already advised to let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak. So why should Yaakov place himself in a situation of anticipated danger and difficulty when it could have avoided.

There are many insights and comments that have been expressed over the ages regarding this problem. I will take the liberty of adding my ideas to possibly explain this quandary. We all are aware that deep within each of us there is a psychological impetus to attempt to correct what we may deem to be a past error of judgment or behavior. In fact, the entire Jewish concept of repentance is built on this and can be mobilized for good and positive purposes. This impulse is usually sublimated when current events constantly impinge upon our lives.

We are busy making a living, raising a family, engaging in a profession or business, studying or teaching, and we have little time to think and recall all our past misdeeds and errors.  In fact, we become so involved in our lives, that almost forget our past behavior and less than noble life patterns. But, as is often the case, the past gnaws upon us, and eventually gives us no rest until and unless we attempt to somehow correct what we feel was wrong and even shameful.



**Rabbi Berel Wein**

Yaakov is aware that he obtained both the birthright and the blessings from his brother by questionable means. This matter has been discussed for millennia, and we have alluded to the many insights, interpretations, comments, and explanations for the behavior of Yaakov. Nevertheless, the issue remains basically unresolved, for the verses in the Torah remain explicit, unchangeable, and eternal. It is, perfectly understandable that our father Yaakov should try somehow to make amends to his brother for the past times that Eisav, wrongly or rightly, felt that he was taken advantage of and deprived of what was really his.

Considering this, it is perfectly understandable why Yaakov behaves in the way he did and bestows upon Eisav such exaggerated gifts. It may be his attempt to square things and to defuse the bitterness of the past. It is not so much that Eisav should be mollified, but, rather, that Yaakov should become refreshed and more at peace with himself regarding his eternal mission of building the Jewish people – a mission which requires that he possess the birthright and the blessings of his father Yitzchak.

Only people who are at peace with themselves can really be constructive and positive in life, for them and others. It is this realization that impels Yaakov to seek out his brother before establishing himself in the land of Israel and beginning to fulfill the mission and the blessings that were rightly given to him.

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

**The Important Mission**

**Of the Fulfillment of the**

**Ultimate Goal of Creation**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



This week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, opens with the words "Jacob sent malachim before him to Esau his brother."

Although the word "malachim" is usually translated in this verse as "messengers," Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator, tells us that Jacob sent "malachim" in the literal sense: "angels" -- actual celestial beings.

Why did Jacob find it necessary to send the angels? Furthermore, in light of the principle that "one angel cannot perform two missions at the same time," by dispatching angels to Esau, Jacob was seemingly diverting them from their Divinely-appointed missions in the heavens.

Chasidic philosophy provides us with the answer by explaining the inner meaning of the angels' mission.

Jacob understood that the entire purpose of creation is the separation of good from evil and the restoration of the "sparks of holiness" to their G-dly source; indeed, this was his sole intention when he set out for the spiritually impure Charan.

Jacob also understood that his service alone was insufficient to achieve his goal; the participation of his brother Esau was also necessary.

**“A Man of the Field”**

Esau, described as "a man of the field," is symbolic of the highest G-dly light fallen to the lowest depths; thus, the ultimate Redemption with Moshiach will only come about when gentiles as well as Jews have reached a state of perfection.

After 20 years of service in Charan, Jacob was ready for the Redemption; he hoped that in the interim Esau had sufficiently refined himself and was ready as well. This is alluded to in Jacob's reference to "a donkey" upon greeting his brother -- symbolic, as our Sages tell us, of King Moshiach, who is described as "riding on a donkey."

**The Most Important Mission of All**

For such an important mission -- indeed, the most important mission of all, the fulfillment of the ultimate goal of creation -- only the finest emissaries would do: celestial angels. For them, this was not an inconvenience at all; on the contrary, it was a very great merit, as they too joyously anticipated the Redemption.

Unfortunately, Esau had not yet completed his service. "We came to your brother," the angels told Jacob on their return, "to Esau." In other words, Esau is still the same person as he was 20 years ago, he hasn't changed. Hearing this, Jacob realized that the road to Redemption would be long and hard, as he told his brother, "I will go ahead slowly."

This, however, was long ago; today, after thousands of years of service, most particularly after the revelation of Chasidut, the preparation for Moshiach, the entire world is ready for the Redemption. All that is left is for it to become manifest in the physical world; may this occur at once.

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**Parshas Vayishlach**

**An Accomplice to Evil**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



“*The sons of Yaakov came upon the corpses of the city that had defiled their sister*.” Bereishis 34:27

Shechem, the son of Chamor, set his sights on Dina. He carefully laid a trap to entice her out of her tent, and then kidnapped and defiled her. When Yaakov and his sons heard what had been done, “*they* *were extremely* *distressed . . .* [andsaid] “*So shall not be done!’*”

Shechem became infatuated with Dina, and came to ask for her hand in marriage. “Name your price and I will pay it,” he said to Yaakov. The brothers of Dina answered Shechem, “To marry into our family, a person must have a Bris Milah.” Shechem and Chamor agreed, and they convinced the people of their town to be circumcised as well. On the third day of their Milah, Reuvain and Shimon took up their swords and killed out every male in the city.

After they were finished, the posuk says, “*the sons of Yaakov came upon the corpses of the city that had defiled their sister*.” The Siforno is bothered by the expression “*the city* that defiled their sister.” After all, it was Shechem alone who committed the act, not the city.

The Siforno answers by explaining that in that society, forcibly taking a woman was not considered abhorrent. If it had not been socially acceptable, Shechem never would have done it. Therefore, it is considered as if they were all participants.

The problem is that the Siforno doesn’t seem to have answered his question. Granted the entire town may have been responsible for creating the social atmosphere that accepted such conduct, but all they did was to give Shechem the opportunity to act as he wished. They didn’t join him in the act. They didn’t aid him. They didn’t tempt him to do it. The most we can blame them for is giving the opportunity to Shechem to do as he chose. If so, how can the posuk say the *city* defiled Dina?

**A Cog in the Wheel of a Killing Machine**

On April 14, 1944, the deportation of Hungarian Jewry began. Within 56 days, almost 500,000 men, women, and children were transported to Auschwitz for their *final solution.*

Imagine that you were a German train switch operator at a station near Auschwitz. You came of age at a time when Hitler had been long accepted as the Fuehrer. From your youth, you were indoctrinated with the belief that the fatherland was the glory of all true Germans, and that Hitler alone was the savior of the new Germany.

It would be hard for you to deny your knowledge of where this human cargo was headed, as the air hung heavy with the smell of burning flesh. But you never killed anyone. In fact, you may not even have completely bought into the racial theory thing. Your job was just to keep those trains rolling. So you aren’t guilty of murder. Are you?

At the Nuremberg Trials, the Nazis defended themselves with the mantra, “We were only following orders.” Each participant denied his guilt by claiming he was just a cog in the wheel – not a murderer himself, not a decision-maker – just a lackey. Yet, even the secular world didn’t accept this because being a cog in the wheel of a killing machine makes you a part of a machine that kills. As such, you are a killer.

The Siforno is teaching us that even if a person is not an active participant in an act, he can be considered responsible for its happening. In a normal society, basic human rights are a given. If the society has failed to keep safeguards in place, then that society has failed in its most basic responsibilities. Every member of that group is therefore held accountable for that failure.

In the case of Dina, the townspeople made it possible for Shechem to do what he did. Without their easing the standards, it never would have happened. Once they lowered the accepted behavior, they paved the way for him, so they are held responsible for what he did.

**A Perspective on Mumbai**

This concept is especially relevant in our times when the murder of innocent people has become an accepted manner of protesting for one’s political rights. Inflicting terror on men, women, and children is almost part of the political process – because it advances *my* cause.

And who is to blame? Certainly in a society that fosters such beliefs, every member of the society is guilty. When a mass murderer has succeeded in his wanton killing, and his hometown comes out *en masse* to celebrate, that town is a participant in the murder.

If a culture encourages the brutal torture of civilians by teaching it as an expression of religion and a “*beautiful thing,*” then every member of that group shares responsibility for the outcome. If the National Palestinian Authority TV programming regularly shows messages of hatred that promote murder and self-mutilation, then the TV anchors, the actors, the scriptwriters, the camera men, and all of the support staff are part of the crime.

**However, the Guilt Doesn’t End There.**

Let CNN be the Judge

The first and primary role of government is the protection of its people. That is self-evident – unless the population is Jewish. In that case, self-preservation isn’t a given, it is deemed amoral.

While it is unclear who empowered the media to be the judge and jury on issues of morality, judge they do. Their bias is clear in every report of the so-called peace process and “*liberation*” attempts.

Every CNN reporter who through his perverse version of social consciousness excuses away murder as a justified expression of “Arab anger and humiliation” becomes a willing accomplice with acts of terror. By creating a world order that condones the killing of Jews, they become accomplices to the very acts they are reporting. While they haven’t pulled the pin on 20 kilos of explosives, their words have created the social climate that encourages this, and as such, they are guilty.

Every media outlet whose bias and prejudices condemn Israel for defending itself makes it more acceptable for global terrorism to go on unchecked, allowing and encouraging more of the same.

The events that we are suffering through, and the clear obstruction of truth that enables them, are but one last stage of our long and bitter exile. May HASHEM speedily redeem 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/)*.*

**What Is Bitachon?**

**Real Confidence**

**By**[**Tzvi Freeman**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/193/jewish/Freeman-Tzvi.htm)

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Generally translated as “trust,” *bitachon* is a powerful sense of optimism and confidence based not on reason or experience, but on [emunah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1398519/jewish/Emunah.htm). You know that “G‑d is good and He’s the only one in charge,” and therefore you have no fears or frets.

Like emunah, bitachon is super-rational. The person who holds such an attitude will always be able to point out the positive side of life’s experiences, but it’s obvious that his or her bitachon is not based upon these. It is not an attitude *based* on experience, but one that *creates* experience. It says, “Things will be good because I believe they are good.”

On the other hand, bitachon is not a strategy to manipulate the universe. Your belief does not create good—the good in which you are so confident is already the underlying reality. Your belief only provides the means by which that reality can surface. See [Is the Law of Attraction Jewish?](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1402579/jewish/Is-the-Law-of-Attraction-a-Jewish-Idea.htm) for more on this point.

There are varying degrees of bitachon, according to a person’s degree of emunah. One person may have emunah that although things right now are not good, they are all *for the good* (eventually). A higher, yet more enlightened emunah is that everything *right now is good*—even when it superficially looks terrible. See [When Bad Is Good](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/974831/jewish/When-Bad-Is-Good.htm) for the stories of Rabbi Akiva and Nachum Ish Gamzu that illustrate how these two attitudes can play out in the resultant bitachon.

**When It’s Needed**

Unlike emunah, bitachon does not live inside a person in a uniform state. Most of the time it’s fine sitting in the background: You go about your business the best you can, with perfect faith that “G‑d will bless you in whatever you do,” and therefore it’s not your own smarts or hard work that will provide success, but “G‑d’s blessing is what makes a man rich.”

But then, situations arise from time to time when you can’t see any natural means by which you can get out of this. At that point, bitachon needs to wake up and step up to bat. Rather than saying, “Woe is me! Who can help me?” you say, “My help is from G‑d, who makes heaven and earth—and therefore can do whatever He wants with them.”

**What It Does**

Bitachon carries with it a profound, albeit subliminal cosmology: Even a simple Jew believes that G‑d can provide for our needs despite all odds—even contravening the natural order—yet without breaking a single law of nature. Healing will come through a good doctor, profit will come through better clientele—yet the doctor and the clientele are only channels for the real healing and profit straight from G‑d’s blessing. In other words, we find in bitachon a G‑d beyond nature, within nature.

Which explains why when a Jew is in trouble, he or she first takes care of spiritual matters—such as checking *tefillin* and *mezuzahs*, pledging charity or some other mitzvah, spending more time in Torah study—before dealing with the material urgency at hand. First get the blessings in place, then deal with the channels through which they will come.

**How to Get it**

For any person, bitachon can be a source of tranquility and happiness through the vicissitudes of life. Many read the story of the manna (Exodus 16) every day to strengthen their bitachon. Reading and telling stories of others who lived on bitachon also helps. But nothing helps more than meditating deeply upon the deep relationship we each have with the Source of All Good, and putting that conviction to work for you whenever necessary.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Vayeitzei 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Lessons to Be Learned**

**From a Powerful Story**

**By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**



Recently, I related the story of Reb Yosef who was childless for many years. Reb Yosef was a chasid of the Maggid MiKozhnitz, and finally, when pushed by his wife, went to the Maggid and insisted strongly that the great Rebbe should bless him with a child.

The Maggid asked him if he was willing to become impoverished and, after consulting his wife, he agreed. So, the Maggid sent him to the Chozeh MiLublin. The Chozeh informed Reb Yosef that years before, when he was young, Reb Yosef had broken off an engagement and never properly asked the young woman for forgiveness.

Then, the Chozeh directed Reb Yosef where to find the woman to ask her for mechila. After traveling to far away Bolta, he amazingly found the woman he had spurned so many years before. She told him that she would forgive him if he would use his life’s savings to help her brother in Slovakia marry off a child.

After traveling to Slovakia, Reb Yosef gave the woman’s brother all his savings and finally he and his wife merited to have a son. In the process of giving his life savings to the brother however, Reb Yosef astonishingly discovered that the woman he had spoken with in the marketplace of Bolta had really passed away fifteen years before.

Now, let’s take a closer look at the story. The very first lesson is how careful we must be not to hurt someone’s feelings. Sometimes if we deeply hurt someone, it could have a long lasting effect and impede us from success in our own lives. As we see in this case, Reb Yosef’s hurting this young lady blocked him and his wife for many years in starting their own family.

Secondly, if we do wrong someone, we should make it our business not to procrastinate in asking for forgiveness. In this case, because he put it off, he needed some miraculous intervention to bring someone back from the dead and he needed to give up his entire life’s savings.

Similarly, because the shevatim never properly asked Yosef for forgiveness, the ten martyrs had to die and, according to the Ben Ish Chai, the ten children of Reb Yochannan also had to die.

Thirdly, we see that sometimes we need to come on to more than one tzaddik in order to achieve assistance. As in this case, it took the joint effort of the Maggid MiKozhnitz and the Chozeh of Lublin to rescue this couple from their misery.

Finally, we see the importance of emunas chachomim, complete belief in our tzaddikim in order to avail ourselves of their help. We see that Reb Yosef was willing to travel to the marketplace of Bolta, to then travel to far off Slovakia, and then liquidate his fortune all on the advice of the Chozeh.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky, shlit”a, says that when one has faith in the blessing of a tzaddik, the blessing is much more powerful. In the merit of our trust in our Gedolim, may we be zoche to long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

Just as an afterword to my dear readership family, this week there was over one million new cases of COVID-19 in America. Dr. Fauci and the CDC issued a warning that people should try to celebrate Thanksgiving at home. Thanksgiving is not particularly our holiday but I took this as a word of caution for those of us who are planning Chanukah gatherings.

Like many of you, I am drooling to once again get together with my children and their spouses, and with all my grandchildren. But, we can’t let our guards down. Our families want us to be there for the long haul.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are already in sight. The Moderna vaccine has proven to have, so far, an exciting 95 percent effectiveness. This is astounding as the measles vaccine is only 93 percent and the flu vaccine is only 50 percent effective. So, with the help of Hashem, we finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. Let’s not let our guards down as we head to the finish line. It’s worth being patient a little longer for the blessing of arichas yomim. Have a safe and wonderful Shabbos.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of The Jewish Vues.*

**A Rabbi’s Confession: What I Discovered by Not Going to Shul**

**By**[**Rabbi Benjamin Blech**](https://www.aish.com/authors/48865417.html)



*I prayed and learned Torah at home, but there was no way I could replace the communal aspect that only a synagogue supplies.*

Who would believe that I would admit to this publicly?

Praying is an essential part of my life. I’ve always been profoundly moved by the beautiful explanation given by rabbinic commentators as reason for why we pray three times a day: If our bodies need the physical nourishment of breakfast, lunch and dinner for a healthy lifestyle then our souls similarly require the spiritual sustenance of Shacharit, Minchah and Ma’ariv. Going to shul is not just a mitzvah, it’s almost a medical requirement.

And yet with just a very few rare exceptions on the High Holy Days – made possible by outdoor prayer on a temporarily closed for traffic city street- I haven’t been able to pray in a synagogue since the start of the global pandemic. For the longest time the local shuls were shut down by city edict. When they finally were permitted to reopen with strict guidelines for number of attendees, age restrictions for the elderly as well as my own doctor’s orders have forced me to continue my personal spiritual quarantine.



**Rabbi Benjamin Blech**

So it is now more than half a year that I haven’t been able to talk to G-d in the sanctity of my otherwise “second home” – a synagogue that allows me to feel kinship not only with the Almighty but with my fellow community of Jews as well.

This period of personal deprivation has taught me a crucial lesson about the blessing of synagogue life. In Jewish tradition a synagogue is known by three different Hebrew names. It is commonly called a *Beit Tefillah* – a house of prayer. Others frequently prefer to refer to it as a Beit Midrash – a house of study. Finally, and perhaps most often, it is known as a *Beit Ha-Knesset*, a house of communal gathering.

The three names emphasize the three different purposes of the place Jewish genius created to serve as substitute for the holy Temple after its destruction. A synagogue, the Talmud tells us, is a *mikdash me’at –*a mini sanctuary and perhaps more than anything else it was historically responsible for the preservation of Judaism and the Jewish people.

**Each of the three Hebrew names for a synagogue emphasizes a different important aspect.**

Yet each of the Hebrew names for a [synagogue](https://www.aish.com/jl/jewish-law/daily-living/15-The-Synagogue.html) emphasizes a different important aspect. Obviously, [prayer](https://www.aish.com/sp/pr/Getting-Your-Prayers-Answered.html) is one of them. Of course it should be called a *Beit Tefillah*, a House of Prayer. Yet, a synagogue without an emphasis on the study of Torah surely lacks a crucial component. It was Rabbi Kook who famously said that the difference between prayer and Torah is that in prayer man speaks to G-d and in Torah God speaks to man. The synagogue needs to emphasize both of these conversations and its Hebrew name can certainly reflect one or the other.

But the third name, *Beit Ha-Knesset*, a house of communal gathering, focuses on a different dimension of synagogue life: community. A synagogue is other people. A synagogue is friendship. A synagogue is sharing in the lives of others. It allows for communal celebrations of joy, commemorations of achievements, exchanging of Mazel Tovs. It makes possible offering condolences, helping others get through times of grief and of sorrows, showing other people with a hug or a handshake that they are not alone.

Yes, we are permitted to pray by ourselves, but it is not ideal. Prayer should take place with a *minyan –*at least nine other people. As a Hasidic rabbi beautifully put it, “The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.”

In the United States, a recent issue of Psychology Today tells us, [loneliness](https://www.aish.com/jw/s/6-Ways-Not-to-Let-Isolation-Get-You-Down.html) is currently at epidemic levels. A recent Cigna [study](https://www.cigna.com/newsroom/news-releases/2018/new-cigna-study-reveals-loneliness-at-epidemic-levels-in-america) of 20,000 U.S. adults found that nearly half of Americans feel like they are alone. There is no doubt that loneliness is on the rise. And it affects people of all ages. A [survey](http://www.aarp.org/research/topics/life/info-2014/loneliness_2010.html) by AARP, showed that more than 42 million U.S. adults over age 45 suffer from chronic loneliness.

In the Torah, after reading of the creation of mankind, the Torah tells us, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). A beautiful rabbinic commentary I once heard on this verse is that it is meant to be an addendum to the previous seven times when G-d, evaluating His acts of creation, uttered His conclusion that “it is good.”

Yes, the world and all that G-d brought into being “is good”, but that is only on one condition. It is good when it is shared. It is beautiful when it is not viewed in isolation. “*Lo tov*” – it is *not* good when we are alone, separated from any sense of communal life, estranged from others and condemned to what criminologists recognize as the cruelest form of punishment – solitary confinement.

A synagogue is primarily referred to as a *Beit Ha-Knesset*. It is where loneliness is exchanged for community, isolation is transformed into the holiness not only of prayer and of Torah study but also of friendship, of shared values, and – yes – even of the kiddush at the end of the services.

**Life when not shared with others is unbearably desolate. And frankly, I'm lonely.**

So here's my confession. I survived seven months without being in shul. But while I sorely missed my House of Prayer, I prayed at home and still found a great deal of spiritual connection with G-d. I did not hear the reading of the Torah in a *Beit Midrash* – but I managed to learn quite a bit on my own with the Torah commentaries in my personal library. But the one thing I could not replace was the *Beit Ha-Knesset*.

Now I truly understand why *Beit Ha-Knesset* remains the most universal way people refer to a shul. Life when not shared with others is unbearably desolate; none of us can be truly human in isolation. Our service of G-d requires that we relate to other people. Frankly, I’m lonely.

And when the day will come, please G-d in the very near future, when the plague will be but a bitter memory, I will treasure as never before the blessings of community, friendship, and of togetherness that only a *Beit Ha-Knesset* can provide.

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**Rav Avigdor Miller on Reading Romance Novels**

**QUESTION:** Many young *frum* women, even women who wear *sheitlen*, regularly read paperback romance novels. What’s your comment on that?

**ANSWER:** Women with *sheitlen;*that’s a sign of being *frum* I suppose. In general, the subject has already been treated in today’s talk – the more you cut loose from the ways of the nations, the better off you are.

I’ll give you an example of what it means a paperback or any other kind of romance novel. Even if it’s a romance that was written fifty years ago – it doesn’t have any indecent scenes and no immorality is described there – however, the material and physical things are elevated to such a status that it corrupts people’s attitudes in the world.

**People are in for a Very Big Disappointment**

Now, love between a husband and wife in the old time romances was always the end of the story; they married and lived happily ever after.  Now, to a certain extent it’s good but the people who live on such fare, they eat that diet all the time, they get the idea that romantic love has to exist always. But actually it’s impossible! It’s unreal and the people are in for a very big disappointment.

The young princess that you married when she was eighteen; she was slim and beautiful, now she’s fat and she’s wrinkled maybe. It can’t be helped. And what are you anyway? You’re not the same Prince Charming.  It’s ridiculous!  It’s unreal to expect those feelings to exist forever!



There’s a loyalty! There’s a bond of marriage! Certainly there’s a loyalty in marriage and it grows as the years pass by. But these imaginary ideas that the romances implant in the mind makes life impossible to live because we cannot conform to these pictures that the writers conjured up out of their minds.  And whatever they write is not true – it’s not true life.  And therefore, there’s no question that the mind becomes warped by reading any gentile novels.

Of course, if you read the modern ones, then people are going to be completely ruined by them.

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