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This Jewish Couple in Maui Is Providing Relief During the Devastating Wildfires

By Kylie Lobell



On August 8, the island of Maui in Hawaii started burning. Dry conditions, combined with droughts and high winds, started the fires, which have so far killed at least 99 people and forced thousands more to evacuate. The historic town of Lahaina, which was once the capital of the Hawaiian Kingdom, has been left devastated. It was the deadliest US fire in more than a century.

Forty minutes away, on the other side of the island, Rabbi Mendel Zirkind, who runs the Maui Kosher Farm with his wife Chani, was on standby, waiting to help those in need. In the morning of August 8, he got phone calls and texts about power outages and spotty internet reception in Lahaina, but he wasn't concerned. "I thought, this is going to come and go and then it'll all be good," said Zirkind, whose home is on a macadamia nut farm in Wailuku.

Bottom of Form

However, the situation took a sudden and alarming turn. Chani received a text message from a Jewish family in Lahaina who told her that they were fleeing their house. They were coming straight to the farm for shelter and safety.

"They said they didn't know if they were going to have a home to come back to," Zirkind said.



Devastation in Maui

The couple, who are affiliated with Chabad, then got a slew of messages about many Jewish families who couldn't get back to their homes. Jewish tourists weren't able to go to their hotels either.

"We had to spring into action," Zirkind said.

The rabbi and his wife live on 1.5 acres of land in Maui where they host Shabbat meals and overnight guests in their cottages, make kosher goat's cheese, slaughter their own chickens and lamb, and provide Jewish services for the 4,000-5,000 estimated Jews on the island. As people were fleeing from Lahaina, they knew what they had to do.

“We put them in our cottages and cabins and put-up tents,” Zirkind said. “People slept in their cars on our farm. We fed them dinner. They took showers. The teenage girls at our summer camp here baked bread. Our farm was coming and going with people asking how they could help.”

Going to the Scene of the Fires

Zirkind knew that there were a number of Jews living or staying in Lahaina, and he wanted to go and help them. He reached out to the sergeant of the Maui police department and asked if that would be possible. The sergeant said yes and gave him a police escort to the other side of the island.

The rabbi packed his cargo van with propane, ice, water and – for a little bit of comfort – bottles of wine.



Rabbi Zirkind, left, helping a person in need

“People would need a glass of wine after the past 24 hours,” he said.

Normally, on Fridays, he would deliver Shabbat packages to the Jewish residents there. He was now going to use the addresses saved in his GPS to find them. Unfortunately, his cell phone reception wasn’t working, and his GPS wouldn’t load.

“It was dark out because there was no power,” Zirkind said. “The streets were empty. I couldn’t see a thing. For five or six hours, I was trying to find people in the dark.”

The rabbi was able to locate a group of 30 Israelis who had worked at stores in the area. He learned that all their stores, homes, and apartments had burnt down, and gave them food and wine when they met up.

“They looked at me like I was a UFO,” Zirkind said. “He said, ‘We’re trying to communicate with the world, and you show up.’ I asked them, ‘What do you mean? I’m the rabbi. I go wherever I’m needed.’”

While he was there, the rabbi filled up the Israelis' cars with gas and gave nearby neighbor's fuel as well.

"I helped them get out of there, *Baruch Hashem*," said the rabbi, who also helped a Jewish couple reunite with their lost dog.

When Zirkind left Lahaina and got back to the farm, he hosted people for several days, including Shabbos.

"Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday I slept for two or three hours a night," he said. "On Friday, I woke up at 4 a.m. and prepared Shabbat for our 30 guests and a whole bunch of families at the hotels. My wife baked. Then, at 3 p.m., I made even more meals. It was fun to cook for two Shabbats the same day."

Fundraising for the Community

Now, Maui Kosher Farm is fundraising to support the community and everyone who lost their homes and businesses in the fire. One person Zirkind hopes to help is a musician and guitar shop owner who lost his tefillin and 300 of his guitars in the fire.

"They are all just dust now," the rabbi said. "It's not the money he's worried about. This was his collection. Every guitar has a story and memory. We're trying to help him out. There's a housing crisis right now in Maui, so we want to raise money to get a fully furnished trailer for this guy. He can park the trailer here on the farm."

Zirkind and his wife are also hoping to raise funds to help people cope with the tragedy.



“We’re trying to bring mental health help and counselors to give people healing,” he said. “People are in such disarray and they don’t know what to do with themselves.”

The Zirkinds are glad they could be there for the Jewish community when it’s in need, and they want to be of further assistance as Maui heals from the fires.

“My wife always wanted to have city of refuge where people can be safe,” the rabbi said. “I didn’t ask for this disaster to happen, but it’s a dream come true to be here when people really need us.”

To donate to the Maui Kosher Farm disaster relief program, visit <https://www.mauikosherfarm.com/fire>.

Reprinted from the current website of aish.com

Is Last Year’s Protective Railing Sufficient for this Rosh Hashanah?

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



Many mitzvot are delineated in this week's Torah portion, Ki Teitzei, including the commandments to return a lost article, aiding a fallen animal, and the prohibition against wearing a mixture of wool and linen (shatnez). The portion also contains the mitzva: "When you build a new home, you must place a guard rail around your roof." Let us explore the inner meaning of this commandment.

In a broader sense, building a new home connotes the beginning of a new chapter in one's life, the commencement of a new form of Divine service. Accordingly, the old guard rails and safeguards which were adequate protection up until now no longer suffice, and new ones must be established.

What One Has Achieved Spiritually Has No Bearing on the Future

The fact that one has thus far been able to withstand temptation has no bearing on the future. When a person embarks on a new path, he encounters situations and circumstances with which he is entirely unfamiliar. Thus, in order to ensure his safety, it is necessary that he set up stronger "fences" around his behavior and demand even greater stringency of himself when it comes to mitzva observance.

This scenario is played out within the context of the Jew's daily existence. Every morning the Jew begins his day with prayer, followed by a period of Torah study. Before going off to work, he must set for himself the proper "guard rails" to ensure that "he not bring blood upon his house" and that "no one fall," i.e., that his business dealings are conducted according to Torah law.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism, said, "A Jew has to live with the times." He meant that a Jew must live with the weekly Torah reading. Each portion of the Torah contains halachot (Jewish laws), mitzvot and stories that are especially relevant to the week when it is read. We "live with the times" when we derive practical direction and guidance from the weekly portion and apply it in our own personal lives.

Every Rosh Hashana a Jew Must Improve One's Divine Service

We are now in the Hebrew month of Elul. The Previous Rebbe once stated: "Every Rosh Hashana a Jew must do something to enhance his observance of positive mitzvot, be more cautious when it comes to the negative ones, and improve his behavior."

This applies even if one's previous conduct has been more than exemplary, for as an entirely new light comes down into the world on Rosh Hashanah, each person must accordingly demand and receive more of himself, erecting new "guard rails" in consonance with the new level of illumination.

Adapted from Volume 2 of Likutei Sichot

Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Teitzei 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim. (Adapted from Volume 2 of Likutei Sichot.)

Rav Avigdor Miller on The Shofar Blasts of Elul



QUESTION: What should we think about during Chodesh Ellul when we hear the shofar?

ANSWER: When you hear the shofar being blown there are many things to think about; not one thing. But number one you have to think — Could it be that they blow a shofar in the city and the people are not afraid?! (Amos 3:6). You have to be afraid right away! You have to be afraid; eimas hadin – fear of the judgment. It's very important. The day is coming and you must be afraid.

Now, being afraid however has to have some practical results. You're saying in selichos all the time something that you never do. – We will search out our ways (Eichah 3:40). Do you search your ways? You never do it! Did you sit down for five minutes once in your life and search out your ways? Never! Oh, but he's saying Mmmuh mmmuh. He's mumbling the words. What a pity.

So, the shofar says, "Start searching your ways!" At least five minutes! Five minutes by the way is a very small time to make an inventory on your business. A businessman who makes only five-minute inventory will go broke. He needs much

more than five minutes. But at least that! At least you shouldn't be a shakran. The whole world is deceiving Hashem. – With his mouth and his lips he honors Me; he says “I will search out my ways,” – but his heart is far away from Me (Yeshaya 29:13). He doesn't think about it at all. It's a terrible thing.

So, when you hear the shofar, think about your ways. Nachpesah! And if you search you'll find. If you mean business you'll find because there's no lack of things to discover. Oh yes, there's plenty to find. And therefore, we should be sure to make use of the shofar blowing in Ellul and not merely let it blow for nothing.

Excerpted from a Parshas Shoftim 5783 email of Toras Avigdor based on Rabbi Avigdor Miller's Tape #E-123 (September 1997) from his classic Thursday night lectures.

Rabbi Berel Wein on Parshat Ki Teitzei 5783



The idea of the necessity of a fence on one's roof and exposed staircases and high landings is a very logical and realistic one. The Torah itself advances this simple reasoning by stating that otherwise one may fall from that exposed area with painful if not tragic consequences. Halacha and practicality indicate that not everyone is obligated in this mitzvah and that there are physical instances where such a fence is impossible to construct or is even unnecessary.

The moral imperative that drives the mitzvah seems to be always operative. A house, a home, a family always needs to be protected, both physically and morally. Just as negligence in failing to erect a fence around one's exposed roof is a cause for

monetary and even criminal liability, so too negligence in failing to construct the moral fence to protect our home and family from the ravages of a rather depraved society is seen to be a serious transgression.

Fences Have to be Fashioned

In raising children, as well as in governing society generally, there can be no doubt that fences have to be fashioned and protected. The rub always is as to how many fences and where they are to be placed and how high the actual fence should be. When it comes to the issue of the physical fences around our rooftops, halacha answers all these questions for us.

But when the issue is regarding the moral fence that we must construct for our family and ourselves, there we find minimal guidance. Just as every physical fence must be constructed to conform to the dimensions of the roof it protects – a circular fence will not completely protect a rectangular roof – so too there is no one-size-fits-all moral fence that is appropriate for every home and family. Tragically, in today's Jewish world, there are many homes that have no moral fence at all protecting the house and family.

Everyone is allowed, if not even encouraged, to live a life without limits, restraints or moral discipline. And at the other end of the spectrum of Jewish society there are homes where the fence has been constructed too high and is too constrictive as to impede and prevent healthy individual development and constructive discovery and innovation. It is obvious that knowing where, when, and how to create this moral fence that will safeguard the Jewish home is the main challenge of parenting and family dynamics.

The Lesson of the Ben Sorer U'Moreh

The Torah in this week's parsha speaks of *ben sorer u'moreh* – a rebellious, undisciplined youth – who will grow to be a very destructive force in society. Such a child in most cases represents the failure in the family in erecting and enforcing the proper moral fence in the house. That negligence of safeguarding the home spiritually, emotionally and morally will invariably come back to haunt that family and all society generally.

There are no magical ways to build these necessary fences. Every family and home is different and unique and there is only the common necessity for all families to erect the proper and fitting fences within their family. Patience, wisdom, restraint, and prayer are key ingredients in accomplishing this vital task.

Shabat shalom

Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com

Helping Your Enemy

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (25:21-22), “If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink—for you will be ‘choteh’ coals on his head, and Hashem will reward you.”

R’ Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z”l (Spain; 14th century) initially rejects the popular translation of the word, “Choteh,” i.e., “scooping.” He writes: G-d forbid that King Shlomo would suggest that one perform kindness for his enemy for the purpose of taking revenge on him.

Rather, the word means, “removing.” One who performs acts of kindness for his enemy “removes” burning coals—i.e., anger—from the enemy’s heart and promotes peace. Alternatively, if the word does mean, “scooping,” the intention would be that one may perform acts of kindness for his enemy so that his enemy will be ashamed to continue hating him.

We read in our Parashah (22:1), “You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother.”

An Act Beyond the Letter of the Law

In Parashat Mishpatim (Shmot 23:4), this same Mitzvah is worded differently: “If you encounter the ox of your enemy or his donkey wandering, you shall return it to him repeatedly.” The commandment in our verse, writes R’ ibn Shuiv, is of general applicability, while the commandment in Mishpatim, i.e., to return the lost animal of one’s enemy, is an act “Lifnim Mishurat Ha’din” / beyond the letter of the law, applicable to a person who wants to conquer his Yetzer Ha’ra.

R’ ibn Shuiv adds that the “enemy” spoken of here is a person that a righteous Jew hates because of the other’s sinful deeds. Otherwise, it is forbidden to hate another Jew. Even so, Hashem does not completely despise even a wicked person, and there is therefore a Mitzvah to assist him, for one should not try to be “more religious” than G-d Himself. (Derashot R”Y ibn Shuiv)

Yehoshua ibn Shuaib (Hebrew: יהושע אבן שועיב; ca 1280 - ca 1340) was a rabbi who lived in Spain. He was a pupil of Solomon ben Adret and the teacher of Menahem ibn Zerah and ibn Sahula.^[1] He is notable for his book of sermons on the Torah, which he seems to have written for preaching in a synagogue.^[2] Each sermon expounds on a weekly Torah portion, derives a moral lesson from it, and teaches some of the laws it contains, or that are relevant to that time of year. Sometimes he creatively links various parts of the portion to a broad ethical or theological theme.^[3] His sermons were first published in Constantinople, in 1523. (Wikipedia)

Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Setse 5783 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter, the parsha sheet for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn.

Thoughts that Count for Our Parsha

When you go forth to war against your enemies...and have taken them captive (Deut. 21:10)

In the spiritual "war" against the Evil Inclination, it isn't enough to merely subdue it; it must also be "taken captive" and utilized in our Divine service. There are many positive lessons to be derived from the Evil Inclination, among them alacrity and devotion. In the same way the Evil Inclination is completely dedicated to fulfilling its mission to cause us to sin, so too should we show the same commitment and enthusiasm in serving G-d. (*The Baal Shem Tov*)

And the firstborn son is hers who was hated (Deut. 21:15)

The "firstborn son" is an allusion to King Moshiach and his ultimate sovereignty in the Messianic era, as it states in Psalms, "I have found David My servant...also I will make him my firstborn," while "hers who was hated" refers to Leah, the mother of Judah, from whom Moshiach is descended: "And when L-rd saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb." (*Ohr HaTorah*)

But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated as the firstborn, by giving him a double portion (Deut. 21:17)

The "son of the beloved" is symbolic of the first Tablets of the Ten Commandments, which G-d gave to Moses before the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf. The "son of the hated" refers to the second set of Tablets, which were given after the Jews repented and became baalei teshuva. The first set of Tablets contained only the Ten Commandments, but the second set contained a "double portion" - not only the Ten Commandments, but all of the minutiae of halacha (Jewish law), Midrash and Aggadah. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

You shall not watch your brother's ox or his sheep go astray... you shall surely help him to lift them up again (Deut. 22:1-4)

When a person helps his neighbor and returns something the other has lost (either physical or spiritual) the benefit is mutual, as our Sages stated: "The advantage extended to the benefactor by the poor man is greater than the advantage extended to the poor man by the benefactor." (*Sefat Emet*)

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First Step to Ascent

By Rabbi Shalom Arush



With the start of Elul, our first priority must be self-correction, for this is the time of year that's so especially conducive for it. Let's take the first step, and Hashem will help us with the rest.

The first step in self-correction, and especially in learning to guard our eyes and in striving for personal holiness, is to know that we have an evil inclination. In other words, a person should be aware that there's a war raging around him, and he must be careful until his very last moment on earth.

After a person is aware of the evil inclination, he begins to pray earnestly. He asks Hashem for assistance in overcoming such evil inclinations as anger, lust and wasting time. He seeks Hashem's help in performing every mitzva and especially in avoiding the transgression of the negative mitzvot such as gossip and slander. He knows what the Gemara warns, that if Hashem doesn't help a person, he can't overcome his evil inclination (tractate Kiddushin, 30b).

What does Hashem want from a person, with this long and dragged-out war? First of all, Hashem wants us to recognize that we have an evil inclination. We did not create it; Hashem, in His Divine wisdom, implanted it within us. Hashem has

placed us in a position in which we have to pray. Hashem doesn't want us to persecute ourselves because we have an evil inclination, nor does He want us to be sad and depressed. He created us in such a manner that we'll always need His help so that we'll pray to Him and seek Him.



The core of all evil is the evil inclination toward sexual lust. Any person who is honest with himself will admit that he has daily challenges with his eyes, which he would not be able to overcome if it were not for Hashem helping him. As such, we must seek Hashem's mercy and assistance every single day in guarding our eyes.

This is a war. The evil inclination is a ruthless enemy. Imagine how we'd pray in the battlefield under intense enemy fire! That's exactly how we must pray in begging Hashem daily to help us guard our eyes. A few mumblings are not enough – one must try to pray for at least thirty minutes a day in asking Hashem to help him guard his eyes and to preserve his personal holiness.

As soon as a person internalizes the fact that he has an evil inclination and that he must pray for Hashem's help, he begins to live a new life of steady spiritual ascent. Hashem is waiting to hear our prayers and is more than happy to help us overcome the evil inclination. There's no other way!

The Heavenly Court won't ask a person why he had an evil inclination and bodily appetites. But they will ask us why we didn't pray and seek Hashem's help.

No one is expected to overcome the evil inclination on his own, as the above-mentioned Gemara teaches us. But we are expected to follow in the example of the great tzaddikim and to pray continuously for Divine assistance.

People protest that thirty minutes a day is too much to devote to guarding our eyes and attaining personal holiness. Does one think that he can overcome such a prodigious evil inclination as sexual lust with a few perfunctory words a day?

What will a person say in his own defense when judgment day comes around? “I wanted to guard my eyes but I couldn’t overcome the urge to look...” The Heavenly Court will respond that if he really would have wanted to guard his eyes, he would have devoted thirty minutes a day in asking Hashem to help him.

Self-persecution doesn’t fix anything. Indeed, it makes things worse. One must take positive action – turn to Hashem and request His assistance! That’s all that Hashem expects from us. The meaning of Hashem’s command to us to be holy (see Leviticus 19:2) is that we do our best to guard our eyes and maintain personal holiness. Once we do, everything else falls into place – we connect with Hashem and begin to taste the sweetness of life.

The greatest obstacle in getting close to Hashem and in making true teshuva is a lack of emuna. This manifests itself in self-persecution, somber moods and emotional fatigue.

Rebbe Nachman says that people fail to heed the advice of tzaddikim because they lack emuna. Whereas the advice of tzaddikim would make life so much easier, those who lack emuna only make life harder on themselves. While many “believe” in Hashem, they don’t apply their belief to their daily lives, for if they did, they’d start praying in earnest. That’s exactly the preparation we need to be doing in Elul.

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