



פרשה Parsha Insights & News



Rosh Hashanah/Shabbat SEPT 12-15, 2007 – Elul 5768

The Orthodox Union West Coast Office 9831 W. Pico Blvd., LA, CA 90035 Please visit www.ouwestcoast.org
KASHRUTH: 310.229.9000 EXT.1 ■ NCSY: 310.229.9000 EXT.209 ■ OU/SYNAGOGUE SERVICES: 310.229.9000 EXT.200 ■ FAX: 310.229.9011 ■ EMAIL: westcoast@ou.org

Though we are in the heart of the season of repentance, changing one's ways is easier said than done. Rav Yisrael Salanter used to say that, "It could take an entire lifetime just to improve one character trait." So how is one to take this opportunity to improve him or herself if the endeavor is so difficult and evasive?

Our rabbis understood the difficulty of this task, and filled the High Holiday season with pointers and strategies for true repentance. To reveal these insights and in order to understand the highlights and depths of each Jewish holiday, it is important to take a look at the Torah reading that was assigned for that day. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah we read about Hashem remembering Sarah and allowing her to conceive. Most explain that we read of this episode because it occurred on Rosh Hashanah and reminds us to repent and pray as she did. However, the Torah reading doesn't end there. For some reason the rabbis included the story of the dispute between Avraham and Avimelech regarding the wells that Avimelech's servants had seized. Since this story ostensibly has nothing to do with Rosh Hashanah, why was it included in the day's Torah reading?

A close examination of the story exposes a fundamental insight into true teshuvah. Avimelech had come to seal a covenant with Avraham, and although Avraham agreed to enter into the alliance, he took the opportunity to state a grievance regarding a disputed well. When Avraham points out that Avimelech's servant had stolen a well of Avraham's, Avimelech's response is instructive. Rather than owning up to the problem, Avimelech counters, "I don't know who did this, nobody ever told me, I never heard about it until today." All Avimelech does in the face of wrongdoing is make excuses and pass the blame, never apologizing or admitting that he did anything wrong. This is a perfect model of the failure of Teshuva. The most basic and essential component of self improvement is acknowledge responsibility. If one can not own up to the fact that they have made a mistake, repentance is impossible.

Perhaps this is why the rabbis included this seemingly irrelevant story in the Rosh Hashanah Torah reading. In order to assist us in our Teshuvah process it is crucial to come to terms with the fact that we must be willing to take the blame and admit our errors if we are ever to become better people. It is true that this is no easy task; it has been quipped that, "It's a rare person who wants to hear what he doesn't want to hear." May we all have the strength and maturity to rise to this challenge, learning true Teshuvah from the mistake of Avimelech. Through taking responsibility for our behavior may we have a year of individual refinement and improved interpersonal relationships.

Rabbi Jason Weiner
Rabbinic Fellow
Young Israel, Century City

ORTHODOX UNION WEST COAST

17TH ANNUAL TORAH CONVENTION

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21 THRU
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2007

GUARANTEEING JEWISH CONTINUITY: KEEPING OUR CHILDREN JEWISH AND ORTHODOX

Presenting our own California
HOME-GROWN TALENT!

Keynote Address Speaker:
**DR. KAREN (KERMAIER)
BACON**

*The Dr. Monique C. Katz Dean,
Stern College for Women*

CHAIRPEOPLE:

**Greg & Andrea Smith
Mark & Stacey Hess**

YOUNG LEADERSHIP CHAIRS:
Akiva & Rachel Greenfield

**Job and Community Fair
Corporate Displays &
Organizational Information**

*At Greater Los Angeles Area
OU Synagogues and the
Crowne Plaza Hotel-Beverly Hills*

Please join us as
conventioners, sponsors, exhibitors.

For information:
310-229-9000
ext 200 or
westcoast@ou.org

**OU THANKSGIVING MISSION TO ISRAEL
MON NOV 19 thru SUN NOV 25, 2007
www.ou.org/israelmission**

*The Orthodox Union only accepts re-
sponsibility for the kosher status of those
advertisers under OU certification. Please
support those who advertise with us.
Call (310) 229-9000 ext.200 email:
westcoast@ou.org for ad info.*

Design & Layout by Lisa

A SWEET, SWEET YEAR

By Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Executive Vice President, Orthodox Union

In these days of the month of Elul, we are already wishing each other *Shanah Tovah u-Metukah*, a "good and sweet new year." To many, this may seem like just a trivial, perhaps even an empty greeting—but it's just the right thing to say at this time of year. But obviously it has a deeper and more profound meaning; expressing the wish of each of us that others, individually, and the Jewish people as a community, will experience a new year that is indeed good and sweet.

The hard-boiled cynics among us may respond, "What good year? What sweet year?" Perhaps for individuals, their year will have moments of goodness and sweetness and perhaps even an absence of real "tzores." But for the Jewish people as a whole? There may be good news here and there, but it is certainly not likely to be a sweet year. After all, threats to the Israel's security abound, and anti-Semitism in its most vile and vulgar form is clearly on the increase, while we are clearly decreasing in numbers and perhaps in influence as well. In short, the Jewish people face tremendous challenges at every turn.

As a possible retort to our "hard-boiled cynic," I draw upon a deep insight I heard long ago from an old Chassidic sage. He asked, "Why do we wish each other both a 'good' and also a 'sweet' new year? What would be wrong with simply saying have a good year?" He answered by distinguishing between the definition of "good" and the definition of "sweet."

After all, "What is good?" is not a simple question to answer. Defining "good" has been a popular philosophical problem from ancient times until today. Indeed, from a Jewish perspective, *everything* is for the good. The believing Jew follows the lesson of the ancient sage Nachum who, in the most tragic of circumstances, would still say "*Gam zo l'tovah*, even this is for the good." So when we wish someone a "good year", who knows what we are really wishing him? "However," pointed out this Chassidic sage, "when it comes to a definition of 'sweet', things are far less ambiguous. Sweet is sweet." And therefore we add the additional wish of a "sweet" year, a year which is clearly and obviously positive, without the necessity of any philosophical spin.

We are taught not to rely upon miracles, and not even to pray for them. So, setting them aside and trying to be very realistic, what are some of the sweet things that could really happen this year, and that we can wish and pray for wholeheartedly, and could reasonably expect?

I would suggest that one of them is the freeing

Continued on back>>>