

It is good to be back. I was away at Limmud NY last week where over 700 participants took over the Hyatt Regency in Princeton, NY and created a sacred space for over 48 hours. Multiple *minyanim*, different learning sessions every hour, delicious food, and of course, a *shuk* where you could buy all kinds of books, posters, and beef jerky. It was energizing, it was inspiring, and although I stayed up for the late evening session and woke up early for the early morning session – I slept more consecutive hours than I have in months.

Thank you to the *shul* for giving me time to learn, to Rabbi Lerner for covering while I was away, and most importantly, to my wife, for watching our three kids. I promise when the kids are all in college you can have a night off.

Some of the courses I attended were:

1. Is Prayer Just for Childless Men – An Analysis of the Interplay Between Family Life and *Shul* Attendance
2. How does *Halakhic* Change Happen – Do the Rabbis Decree or the People Demand?

And finally,

3. How Much Do I Really Have to Care About My Neighbor?

To save you the time:

1. No
2. Both

and

3. More than you probably think.

Each class was taught by incredible teachers from the Hartman Institute, the Pardes Institute, other rabbis, and my personal friends. I even attended a panel discussion where our congregant Amram Migdal's sister was one of the speakers.

Many of the classes involved participation, *hevruta* studying based on our sacred texts.

The source sheets included texts from the Torah, the Talmud, the Middle Ages, and modernity. Each source lending a voice, providing wisdom, to a particular issue and, ultimately, what is God's will.

In other words, how best to move forward when there is a problem or question.

In last week's *parshah*, we learned the next step in our communal history was to be build the *mishkhan*, God's portable sanctuary – this week – we learn what to wear when tending to it.

In one part of the *parshah*, we learn about a special garment worn by the *kohen gadol* known as the *hoshen mishpat*, the breastplate of Justice, which sounds like a prop from a Batman[©] movie.

And on this *Hoshen Misphat* –

Exodus 28:21

וְהָאֲבָנִים תְּהִינָן עַל־שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה עַל־שְׁמֹתֵם פְּתוּחֵי חוֹתֶם אִישׁ עַל־שְׁמוֹ תְּהִינָן לְשָׁנֵי
עֲשָׂר וְשֶׁבַע:

The stones shall correspond [in number] to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names. They shall be engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.

Twelve Stones.

Twelve Tribes.

Three across representing the patriarchs.

Four down representing the matriarchs.

And inscribed on each stone were the names of the tribes.

For parity, the Midrash explains they wanted there to be an equal number of letters per stone so they added:

Avraham,

Yitzhak,

Shivtey Yeshurun – a poetic name for Israel – the Upright Ones.

(ברקת) לוי רהם	(פטרה) שמעון ב	(אודם) ראובן א
(יהלום) זבולן ח	(ספיר) יששכר צ	(נופק) יהודה י
(אחלמה) גר שבטי	(שבו) נפתלי ב	(לשם) דן ק יעק
(ישפה) בנימין	(שהם) יוסף ון	(תרשיש) אשר ישר

6 letters x 12 stones = 72 total letters.

72-letter name of God.

72 names of God.

What was its function?

Ascertaining God's will.

Whenever there was a matter concerning the king, the *Beit Din*, or the entire Jewish people, it could be settled by using the *Hoshen Mishpat*.

The questioner would stand behind the *Kohen* while the *Kohen* faced the Ark.

He would then ask his question in a quiet voice while letters in the *Hoshen Mishpat* would illuminate.

Then the *Kohen Gadol* would pronounce the Will of God.

Easy right? We face a national problem – we get to go to the Source of All to find the solution.

Friends, I don't need to cite the statistics or the consequences of our country's obsession with firearms. For the moment, can we accept that we are an outlier when it comes to frequency of mass shootings and it is something that we need to remedy?

So how do we ascertain the best way to move forward?

How many of you watched last Wednesday night's "Stand Up: The Students of Stoneman Douglas Demand Action?" 7,000 people packed together to remember and discuss how to move forward.

For the first time on TV, I felt, there were politicians, parents, and activists, asking real questions, trying to evaluate real solutions.

On the stage: Republican Senator Marco Rubio, Democratic Senator Bill Nelson, and Democratic Congressman Ted Deutch.

In one exchange, Marco Rubio spoke of the limitations of banning assault rifles and the merits of mental health screening and background checks.

As a counterpoint, Bill Nelson spoke of the necessities of banning certain weapons and the difficulty and vulnerabilities of only enforcing background checks.

It felt like, for the first time, we could appreciate the complexity of the issue and have a policy conversation.

That policy conversation though fizzled after a while and turned more into a blame game.

And again this is turning into a blame game.

But something feels different this time. It is children who are leading the way with action and mobilization.

And one could fret that it will result in the same cycle that happened after Sandy Hook, or the Pulse nightclub, or Virginia Tech.

But it is the children who are leading the way.

What children can do versus adults appears in the book of Joel.

The prophet Joel is hard to pin down in history, but in general is known for expressing frustration with the Jewish people and the promise that one day, God will return to God's people.

There is an interesting passage that states:

וְהִנֵּה אֲחֵרֵי־יְכֹן אֲשַׁפֹּךְ אֶת־רוּחִי עַל־כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר וְנִבְאוּ בְנֵיכֶם וּבָנֹתֵיכֶם זְקֵנֵיכֶם חֲלֹמוֹת יַחְלְמוּן בְּתוֹרֵיכֶם
חֲזִינֹת יִרְאוּ:

After that, I will pour out My spirit on all flesh; Your sons and daughters shall prophesy; Your elders shall dream dreams, And your youth shall see visions.

Why the difference?

How are dreams different than visions?

Why do the old have dreams and the youth have visions?

Historically, in the Torah, dreams can be interpreted. Dreams are metaphors. Dreams don't always amount to much. Dreams have the capacity of staying only in our minds and not turning into action.

Visions, on the other hand, tend to be clearer.

When Avraham had a vision or Moshe – it was very clear what they need to do. Build the *menorah*, the covenant between the parts.

Perhaps what the world needs now is less dreaming and more people with vision.

These teens' vision currently includes a march on Saturday, March 24, which, of course, is on Shabbat. I am pleased to report that USY will support up to 150 people who wish to travel to D.C. from other communities. They will provide transportation to and from local airports to Adas Israel, which has graciously agreed to host teens for Shabbat. They will attend Friday night services, have Shabbat dinner, sleep on the floor of the synagogue, attend Shabbat services in the morning and then walk to the rally at the Mall. They will then return, process what they experienced, rest, and then *daven Ma'ariv* and *Havdallah* together. Please be in touch if you'd like to learn more or participate.

Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way they ought to go; They will not swerve from it even in old age.

We have been teaching these kids to be leaders, to stand up for injustice.

Just as the *Urim* and *Tummim* would illuminate the letters on the *kohen gadol's* breastplate to inform the people on issues of national significance, today it is the children who are leading us forward with their vision, resolve, and determination.

From 19th Century Hasidic Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz:

A man was lost in the forest for several days, and could not determine which was the correct path. Suddenly he saw another person walking towards him. He rejoiced greatly, thinking, “Now surely I will find the right path.”

When the two met, the first asked, “My brother, please tell me which is the right path; I have been lost for several days.” The other man said to him, “My brother, I do not know, since I too have been lost for several days. But one thing I will tell you: the way that I went you should not go, because that way you will get lost again. Now come let us search together for a new way.

We know which paths following a national tragedy don't lead us out of the proverbial forest, perhaps, these teens will help show us the way.

May God give strength to their worthy endeavors and let us all say: Amen.