

Dr. Yehuda to Speak in N.Y.

Dr. Zvi Yehuda, Professor of Bible and Rabbinics at the College of Jewish Studies and author of the weekly column Thought of the Week, will deliver daily lectures in biblical topics at the national Hebrew Week of the Histadrut Ivrit of America, during July 13-20 at the Hotel Gibber, Kiamesha Lake, N.Y.

The Hebrew Week is an annual gathering of scholars, educators, and other dedicated Hebraists, from all over United States, Canada, and Israel, who share a week of study and discussions on cultural issues all in Hebrew.

This is the 15th consecutive year in which Dr. Yehuda will deliver these daily lectures.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP is a dominant theme in Jeremiah's prophecies (2:8):

The kohanim say not, "Where is the Lord?"

The upholders of Torah know Me not!

The shepherds rebel against Me;

The neviim speak in the name of Baal -

And after the useless they go...

The "kohanim" (priests) are appointed to be the upholders of Torah, to guard and teach the divine laws to the people. But they themselves are without a genuine quest for God; they ignore the One believed by the people to have led them throughout their history (v. 6). The "shepherds" are the political rulers; they are supposed to lead their people with care and compassion, but they too offend God. So do the "neviim" (referring in context to false prophets) who rely on, and speak in the name of, useless idols and ideals. The decline and fall of the people is thus related to the fault of the leadership. Certainly, bad leaders have a bad impact on their generation. The reverse is also true: A bad generation generates bad leaders. So claims Sefer Hasidim (13th century) that the low quality of the leaders is the fault of the people (No. 225): "When a generation has bad leaders, it is because they despise the good leaders."

Candlelight time 8:43 Sabbath ends 9:36

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 12:

MATTOT-MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13

HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28, 3:4

.Rosh Hodesh Av, Monday, July 14

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL'S GLORY is portrayed in Jeremiah's prophecy (4:1-2): "When you return, O Israel—says the Lord—when you return to Me, when you remove your abominations from My presence and do not waver—and you pledge 'as the Lord!' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness—then shall the nations bless themselves by Israel, and in Israel shall they glory." The biblical oath "as the Lord lives!"—if made sincerely—implies Israel's return to God and its loyal adherence to Him. Three qualifications for a sincere pledge are mentioned: *emet* (truth), *mishpat* (justice), *tzedaka* (righteousness); the final term connotes charity and loving-kindness as well. Israel's glory among the nations depends on the implementation of these Torah ideals.

Candlelight time 8:40 Sabbath ends 9:33

Scriptural reading for Saturday, July 17:

MATTOT—MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13

HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4; 4:1-2

Rosh Hodesh Av: July 21

MATTOT—MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13

HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4 4:1-2

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

CLINGING TO HERITAGE is Jeremiah's concern in the name of God(2:13): "For two are the evils My people have committed: Me, the source of living water, they have forsaken to dig for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which hold no water." The mistake of abandoning the heritage is two-fold: in what is lost and in what is gained. What is lost, given up, is genuine and sustaining; what is gained, as substitute, is forged and disappointing. So, too, is the advantage of cherishing the heritage two-fold: in its own value and substance, and in its being a shelter and protection from the prevailing influences of fleeting and shallow trends of the moment. Man does not live in a void. He is either nourished by his heritage - enjoying "the source of living water" - or else, he is wholly molded by the immediate impact of his environment: often realizing that he is digging "broken cisterns which hold no water."

MATTOT-MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13; 28:9-15

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 66

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“LO YAHHEL DEVARO” (Num. 30:3) means that a person “must not disregard his word but fulfill all that is uttered by his mouth. “Lo yahel” says more than its common translation: not to break, violate or profane. More precisely, it means not to render mundane. A person must not treat his word as trivial – meaningless and inconsequential – but with respect and consideration. Yet, man is obliged by his word, not enslaved by it; he must honor, not fear it. The pagan approach to the spoken pronouncement as innately possessing magic and thus being all powerful and irreversible is totally rejected by Torah. Torah provides dignified, recognized ways of dissolving the binding force of a pronounced expression, when justified. Thus, both the inherent liberty of man as well as the solemnity of his spoken word are retained and cherished. The emphasis is on concern, rather than compliance, with the spoken word. In itself, man’s word is worthless and revocable; but due to the duty of man to be truthful and trustworthy and to the importance of his speech – man’s mark of distinction – he is called upon to keep and revere his words. Torah’s rule of “lo yahel” is concerned with man’s dignity and mastery; it is rooted within the general principle of “kedusha” – that man’s life, in its various expressions, must be charged and imbued with a sense of significance and meaning.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ACCIDENTAL HOMICIDE is treated by Torah neither vindictively as intentional nor lightly as inconsequential. Only in rare cases when the accident was clearly without human blame, determined by forces beyond human control, we hold none legally responsible. In most cases, however, the accidental killer is neither guilty as a vicious criminal nor innocent as a non-involved party. Accidents are not always inevitable and unavoidable. Jewish law demands that people exercise utmost caution and care in order to eliminate avoidable accidents. "I did not mean it to happen" is a weakly, unacceptable argument; "Did I do the most that it should not happen?" is a pertinent question. Recklessness and negligence, even with no explicit malice nor criminal intent, are no excuses; human beings, in Torah's view, are expected to act carefully and responsibly and account for the results of their conduct both by their commissions and omissions. In biblical days an unintentional killer was exiled to an asylum city ("ir miklat"), remaining there till the death of the high priest, thereby being protected from the uncontrolled vendetta of the victim's relatives and also punished for his carelessness, thus learning the supreme lesson of Torah that human life is infinitely precious.

Candlelight time 8:37 Sabbath ends 9:30

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 21:

..MATTOT-MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13

..HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4; 4:1-2

...Rosh Hodesh Av - Wednesday, July 25

MATTOT-MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13

HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4; 4:1-2

Rosh Hodesh Av - Wednesday, July 28

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

..CITIES OF REFUGE (“arei miklat;” Nu. 35:9-34) were prepared in biblical Israel for the involuntary killer. Their purpose was double: protection and expiation. In antiquity, even in cases of unintentional, accidental manslaughter, the victim’s relatives deemed it a duty of honor to avenge his blood: they killed the killer, no matter how responsible he really was. The Torah placed the decision of his guilt or innocence within the sole jurisdiction of the court; and, if declared acting without malice and intent, offered him a haven to protect him from harassment and vengeance. This haven served also as a mode of atonement. The killer, though not a willful murderer, still must bear some guilt for having taken a human life. Accidents very often could and should be avoided by exercising more caution and alertness. Bloodshed must never be left unnoticed and unchecked: the killer must be expiated. The city of refuge, where the killer stayed until the death of the High Priest, served for him as a place of education and contemplation, exalting the ultimate value of human life.

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 16:

MATTOT—MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13, 28:9-15

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 66

Rosh Hodesh Av - Friday, July 15

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HUMAN BLOODSHED is defilement of society and defiance of God (Nu. 35:34). Every homicide is genocide and deicide. Each individual is a whole world, a potential for future generations. Destroying him is elimination of his posterity; hence, a form of genocide. Each human being is born in God's image, a representation of divine glory. Hurting him is diminution of God's presence within us; hence, a form of deicide. Genocide is an atrocious repetition of countless homicides. There is no murder of an abstract totality (political entity), without murder, in terrible reality, of many specific human beings; no mass murder, without murder of many individuals. People, in Judaism, are counted not as numbers, but as unique and infinite; each as a divine entity. On the other hand, Deicide, in its theological sense, is utterly meaningless to Jews. We believe in a Living God. A "god" that can be dead or killed is, by definition, a false god. The true God is not concerned about being Himself "killed." He cares that we will not kill each other. Only by killing mortals (any mortal!) is God defied. For we all are His children.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MURDER, THE ULTIMATE CRIME, calls for the ultimate punishment: "life for life!" However, Torah's rigorous procedure of testimony and warning makes the actual execution of the death penalty an almost impossibility. Nonetheless, in theory, the principle of uncompromising retribution for bloodshed retains forever its profound moral impact: The heinous crime of destroying human life can be neither excused nor expiated by any compensation monetary or religious. There is no cover-up ("kofer") for murder! Murder is an offense against the very essence of existence, life; admitting "kofer" for murder, either legally by undue leniency or theologically by unwarranted love, upsets cosmic ecology and undermines creation itself (Nu. 35:33): "Do not corrupt ("tahanifu") the earth on which you exist!" By forgiving or overlooking murder we "corrupt" (make "hanef") the earth. The verb "tahanifu" (in the causative) also means to foster hypocrisy, flattery and falsehood. The message is thus brought forth by the rabbis: Do not flatter the murderer, fear or appease him on account of his might or position; for by being hypocrites ("hanefim") towards the murderer, we cause the earth on which we live to be "hypocritical" towards us. By curbing our moral indignation against murder, by being "loving" and "forgiving" towards the murderer, we virtually encourage murder and collaborate with the murderer. Thus we "corrupt" (or "pollute") our earth. We make the whole world murderous.

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Aug. 5:
MATTOT-MASE: Numbers 30:2-36:13
HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4

MATTOT-MASE Numbers 30:2-36:13

HAFTORAH: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 3:4; 4:1-2

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

LIVING THE JEWISH HERITAGE as the core of a Jew's very being is Torah's message: Judaism is worth living. Regarding Judaism as something "worth preserving betrays an attitude toward a relic, dear but dead. But Judaism is a living force. Ask not what you can do to "preserve" Judaism, but what Judaism can do to sustain and enrich you. Man's quest for meaning is persisting. No substitute can ever quench man's spiritual thirst for the real - his genuine roots and heritage. The result of alienation and assimilation is therefore a double disillusionment, what is lost and what is "gained." "For two are the wrongs My people have done: Me, source of living water, they left, to dig for themselves cisterns, cracking cisterns that hold no water." (Jeremiah 2:13)