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Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Matos Masei 5764

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Parsha Parables - Blessed Journeys

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The second of this week's two parshiyos is named Masei, Travels. It begins by enumerating the various stops along the Jewish nation's forty-year trek through the desert. The first posuk opens the narrative. "These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, under the hand of Moshe and Aaron" (Bamidbar 33:1). The second posuk seems to have a redundant and unclear clause. "Moshe wrote their goings on according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings on (ibid v.2). But the phrase seems to be juxtaposed differently at the beginning and at the end of the very same sentence. At first the Torah says "Moshe wrote their goings on (experiences) according to their journeys," and when the Torah begins listing each stop it precedes the listings by stating "these were their journeys according to their goings on (experiences)."

What does the Torah mean "journeys according to their goings on"? The word translated as "goings on" is motzoaihem, which means experiences. The Torah is relating not only the geographical destinations of the Jews as they wandered, but also the historically eternal implications of each rest-stop. Thus the Torah tells us more than the journeys. It tells us the journeys according to their experiences. Were the journeys listed according to the experiences or were the experiences listed according to the journeys?

The story is told about the Toldos Ahron Rebbe. He was sitting at his table with one of his Chasidim. After a very long while, the shammus brought a bowl of beautiful fruit to the table. It was quite appealing and the Rebbe noticed the sparkle in the eye of the hungry patron. The Rebbe invited his disciple to make a blessing over the shiny crimson apple. The guest declared that such a beautiful fruit was worthy of a beautiful blessing and he resolved to make a blessing with all his heart (one truly befitting this marvelous creation. The chasid stood up, held the apple in both hands, and spent a few minutes contemplating the delicious fruit that Hashem had created. His eyes sparkled in anticipation, which enthused him even more. Carefully he annunciated every word of the blessing. Swaying back and forth he began, "Boruch Atah, Blessed art Thou..."

After what must have been the most eloquent blessing the man ever recited, he bit excitedly into the delicious fruit, and after swallowing, he once again praised the beautiful taste and appearance. The man seemed to revel in his act of spirituality, and the Rebbe knew he had to explain something to him. "You made a beautiful bracha my dear disciple," he began. "Now I will teach you the difference between your blessing and the blessing of a complete tzadik."

"You saw the fruit. You wanted to eat it. But alas, one is not allowed to eat a fruit without a blessing over it. And so you made a most beautiful blessing. It is truly commendable. "A complete tzadik, however, does not have his mind set on fruit. He wants to bless Hashem for his beautiful handiwork. But alas, one is not allowed to make that blessing without partaking in the pleasure of His handiwork. And so he looks for a fruit. When he finds the fruit, he is now ready to make the blessing he had long waited to make."

Every meaningful experience is comprised of temporal circumstances and spiritual, philosophical or ethical ramifications.

In the larger picture, in view of the greater picture one may ask:

Was it the circumstance that is the foremost character of the experience, or was it the experience that makes the circumstances pale in retrospect.

The Torah tells us that Moshe wrote their goings on according to their journeys. That seems to say he wrote the occurrences, the various events, traumatic and otherwise, that occurred as a result of the journeys. After all, as a result of their journeys certain events occurred. Fate brought them to certain places and thus certain events occurred. To our human eye that is what happens in life. We go places. We do things. Events occur. But the Torah itself announces these journeys with a twist. It declares the journeys in a different light. It does not precede the events saying this is what happened as a result of the journeys. Just the opposite! It tells us "These are the journeys according to the experiences." The journeys were secondary to the experiences, the journeys were listed according to the experiences! Maybe in life's journeys and the ensuing experiences, perhaps in all our actions it is worth reflecting. Do we bless to eat or do we eat to bless?

Do we mark our experiences according to where we travel, or do we mark our travels according to where we have had our experiences? It is critically important to understand what has occurred and its ramifications, perhaps more than the mere geographic vehicle that brought us to our life's true destination.

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"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frاند on Parshas Mattos-Masei

Money and the Kids

And they said, "We will build sheep pens for our livestock here and cities for our children." (32:16)

The Jewish people reached the plains of Moav, the jumping-off point for the invasion of Canaan, which was imminent. But the tribes of Gad and Reuven, rich in livestock, preferred the lush pasturelands of the Trans-Jordan to shares in Eretz Yisrael proper. They asked Moshe for permission to take their share in the Trans-Jordan.

Moshe berated them for letting the others fight to conquer Canaan while they settled down in their ranches. Furthermore, their reluctance to cross would have a demoralizing effect on the others, just as the report of the Meraglim had demoralized the people thirty-eight years earlier.

"This is what we want to do," they said to Moshe. "We want to build sheep pens for our livestock here and towns for our children. Then we will go quickly at the head of the army and fight until the land is conquered and apportioned. Only then will we return to our homes."

"All right," said Moshe (32:24), "build towns for your children and pens for your sheep. And make sure you keep your word."

Notice that Moshe reversed the order of their priorities. They wanted to "build sheep pens for our livestock here and towns for our children." First let us take care of the livestock. Let us make sure we have pens in which to keep them so they don't wander off into the hills and get lost or stolen.

Cows and sheep are valuable assets, and we have to take good care of them. Then they spoke about building "towns for our children." Then we will provide our children with a place to live while we are at war.

Oh no, Moshe replied. You have it backwards. First of all, "build towns for your children." Make sure you have attended to the needs of your children. Afterwards, you can also build "pens for your sheep." First you take care of your children, then you worry about your cattle.

The Midrash sums up the exchange with the verse (Koheles 10:2), "The heart of the wise man is on his right, and the heart of the fool is on his left." Moshe's heart was on the right. He had his priorities right. Their hearts were on the left. They gave precedence to secondary considerations. They were more worried about their money than their children.

When we look at this incident, we say to ourselves, “How foolish can people be? How warped can their values be? How can anyone put the welfare of his cattle before the welfare of his children?”

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident, something bizarre that happened thousands of years ago. It is an everyday phenomenon. People become focused on their livelihood, on developing a business, on advancing professionally, on building a practice, and their kids get lost in the shuffle. They don’t realize that they are making the exact same mistake as the tribes of Gad and Reuven. But it is true. It happens all too often.

Rashi writes (32:24) that the tribes of Gad and Reuven did not return home to the Trans-Jordan until after the seven years of conquest and the seven years of apportionment. They remained in Eretz Yisrael for a full fourteen years. Those little children they left behind—let’s assume they were 3 or 4 years old—how old were they when their fathers returned home? Teenagers! Practically adults. The Midrash tells us that their fathers were shocked to find that their sons had long hair, that they were indistinguishable from their pagan neighbors.

This is what happens when parents give priority to their wealth over their children.

The Ksav Sofer raises a question with the latter part of Moshe’s words. After helping the tribes of Gad and Reuven get their priorities straight, he told them, “Make sure you keep your word.” Why was this necessary?

The answer, says the Ksav Sofer, is that Moshe knew with whom he was dealing. People who could even think of protecting their money before they protect their children cannot be trusted. They are so intent on their wealth that they can do anything. Therefore, Moshe had to exhort them to keep their word.

Rav Tzaddok Hakohein explains that the desire for money is greater than any other material drive, since it is the only one that is insatiable. There is a limit to how much a person can eat, to how many times he can commit adultery, but there is no limit to how much money he can accumulate. The quest for wealth can become more obsessive than any other quest. All too often, the children are the price of the wealth.

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WORLD WAR I AND THE JEWS Rabbi Berel Wein

We are about to mark the ninetieth baleful anniversary of the outbreak of World War I - the “Great War” as it was then naively known. The war was the catalyst for all of the other murderous wars, revolutions and events of the bloodiest century in human history that followed this war. The war was brought about by catastrophic miscalculations of the great European powers. It was a combination of reckless politicians, stupid generals and strong jingoist nationalistic fervor in all of the countries of Europe that brought about the catastrophe. The war claimed millions of lives and was followed by an influenza epidemic that claimed millions more. More American soldiers in Europe died of influenza in the war’s aftermath than did in actual combat. No country in Europe except Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries and Holland was spared. The war was a total war and it was therefore a total disaster to all concerned. But in a perverse and not too surprising twist of events, in perfect hindsight, we can conclude that it was the Jewish population of Europe that was most affected and damaged by the war. The Jews as individuals fought in the armies of all of the combatants. As was their wont, the Western European Jews became the super patriots of their respective countries, determined to prove thereby that they really “belonged.” This was especially true of German Jewry. Over twelve thousand Jews died fighting for the “Vaterland.” Their patriotism and sacrifice would turn to ashes, literally, within twenty years.

In spite of their super patriotism, the Jews in Germany were subject to accusations of disloyalty and shirking. In 1916, the German General Staff ordered a census of all Jewish soldiers in the army to determine how many were actually serving and the percentage of their actual front line combat. A fabricated census was publicized with great fanfare, intimating

that the Jews were shirking their duty. The actual results of the census that showed that eighty percent of all Jewish soldiers were serving on the front lines and that the Jewish numbers in the army were far higher than they were in the general population were never published or released to the general public (shades of the UN and the EU!). Anti-Semitism was very strong and virulent in Germany before World War I. The war itself and Germany’s subsequent defeat only served to exacerbate it. The stage was therefore already set for the “Jewish-led-stab-in-the-back” betrayal theory that brought Hitler and Nazism to power. The Germans really believed that “the Jews are our misfortune.”

For the Jews in Eastern Europe, the war brought on unmitigated tragedy. A quarter million of them died in the war, in its battles and from dislocations. Over a million of them became refugees as the Czar accused them of being German collaborators and forced them to leave their homes in western Russia, Poland and Lithuania and settle in inland Russia, far from the front. Because of the Czar’s behavior towards the Jews, many actually welcomed the conquering Germans and Austrians as liberators and benefactors. The Jewish infrastructure in Eastern Europe, socially, economically, culturally and religiously, was almost completely destroyed by the war. The war also served to radicalize much of Eastern European Jewry’s youth, with secularism and Marxism being the main beneficiaries of this trend. The yeshivot were scattered and in exile and many of the Chasidic courts and dynasties were decimated. The Bolshevik revolution brought on by the war attempted to destroy Russian Jewry and the practice of Judaism. The anti-Semitism of the Polish and Lithuanian nationalists became overt and violent. Again, in perfect hindsight, it seems clear that even without the Holocaust occurring, Eastern European Jewish life was on the wane.

The “Great War” was also the catalyst for the Zionist movement’s success in creating a Jewish society and eventually a Jewish state here in the Land of Israel. The exigencies of war brought England to issue the Balfour Declaration and served to end the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire over the country. The war also reawakened long dormant Arab nationalism and set in motion the conflicting forces driving the Arabs and the Jews. The war served to harden Jews, physically, emotionally and mentally. The great divides that then existed (and still do) within the Jewish world would not be easily bridged for the ideologies and beliefs that drove them had become annealed in the heat of the terrible war that engulfed them all. The world generally and the Jewish people most particularly are still paying the bill for the disaster that befell mankind ninety years ago with the coming of World War I. Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha MATOT - MASEI Rabbi Berel Wein July 16 2004

The conclusion of the book of Bamidbar that these parshiyot mark, to a great extent ends the narrative section of the Torah. The generation of Egypt and Sinai is no more. Moshe’s fate that he too will not enter the Land of Israel has been sealed. Yet, in order for the new generation and the new leader of Israel, Yehoshua, to succeed, a review as to what occurred to the previous generation is necessary. It would not be farfetched to suggest that the parsha of Maasei, which details all of the stops and way places of Israel in the desert journey of the Jewish people, can be considered already as part of Dvarim - “Mishneh Torah” - Moshe’s repetition of the Torah at the end of his life. Only if one knows where one has been and has learned something valuable from that experience can one confidently continue on one’s journey. Even though the future is always an unknown and uncertain commodity, knowledge of the past minimizes the surprises that may yet lie ahead. The Torah goes into great detail to inform us of where we have been, how we got there and what happened to us on that journey. This is all in the hope that something can be gleaned from the past and applied to our current and future situations and challenges.

For a people so rich in historic experience and worldly knowledge, the Jews somehow surprisingly are reluctant to incorporate hard-earned lessons of the past into current attitudes, values and behavior. The past errors of the encouragement of assimilation, of belief in utopian solutions

to human and societal problems, of naive pacifism and lack of self-pride, of worshipping strange gods and false idols, all are repeated again in our times. It is as though the long journey of Israel and all of its way stations has been forgotten, misinterpreted and ignored. We could construct our own parshat Maasei from the experiences of the Jewish people over the past three hundred years. We would be wise to remember the debacle of nineteenth century Jewish German assimilation, the destruction that the Jewish left foisted upon us in its blind and foolish belief in Marxist doctrine and the uncaring aloofness of Western civilization, in the main, towards Jewish suffering and persecution. If we remembered our own Maasei, we could easily say: "Been there, done that" to most of the ideas now floated about for solving our problems. We are not doomed to repeat all of the past errors committed on our journey through history. Yet, if we forget or ignore the lessons that those past errors produced, our present and future problems are bound to increase, substantially and intensively. Thus, it is obvious that every generation writes its own parshat Maasei. The greatness of such a parsha is only realized when it has meaningfully absorbed the lessons of the previous parshiyot Maasei of Jewish life. This guide to the past is the strongest guarantee of the success of our journey into the future. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

Ohr Torah Stone - Rabbi Riskin's Shabbat Shalom
Shabbat Shalom: Parshiot Matot Masei 28 Tamuz 5764, 17 July 2004

Efrat, Israel - Our Bible develops from the story of a family in the Book of Genesis - Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob his four wives and thirteen children, replete with jealousies, intrigues and sibling rivalries - to the emergence of a nation in the Book of Exodus. And the bridge between family and nation seems to be the twelve tribal divisions enunciated by Jacob, especially in his final blessings before his death. However, the tribes do not disappear with the development of the nation. In the incidence of the twelve scouts, princes of each tribe are specifically chosen, and this week's Torah portion begins with Moses' presenting the commandments regarding the laws of promises and oaths to the "heads of the tribes" (Numbers 30:2). Indeed, the very division of the land of Israel is established along tribal lines, the Biblical book of Judges is filled with tribal rivalries and murderous tribal conflicts, and even after King David unites the nation under one monarch with a single capital City of Jerusalem, the enmity of Judah and Ephraim persists until the destruction of the Holy Temple. Maimonides goes so far as to legislate separate Courts of Law for each individual tribe. Even to this very day, kohen-priest descendants of Aaron from the tribe of Levi rise to bless the congregation (daily in Israel, on the festivals in the diaspora), and all the descendants of the tribe of Levi are called to the Torah immediately following the first-to-be called kohen. Why retain a tribal system which seems to have only contributed to the internecine strife which prevented the united period of Kings David and Solomon from becoming the norm of Israel's government?!

I believe that a careful reading of this week's Torah portion - and especially paying attention to two different Hebrew words for the noun translated as tribe - will provide the answer to our question; it will also present us with the proper fashion in which to forge a nation dedicated to the ideal of "perfecting the world in the kingship of Divine".

The Hebrew word generally used for tribe is shevet; when grand-father Jacob concludes his blessings-descriptions of his twelve sons, certainly highlighting the differences and even the tensions between them, the Biblical text states "all of these are the tribes (shivtei) of Israel, twelve (in number)" (Genesis 49:28). Similarly, our Torah reading this week speaks of half the tribe (shevet) of Menasheh" (Numbers 32:33). However, there is another Hebrew word used for tribe, matteh, and it is the noun in the very opening verse of our torah portion: "And Moses spoke to the heads of tribes... (mattot, translated by Targum as shivtaya)" (Numbers 30:2). The very Book of Numbers, which opens with a census count of each of the tribes, provides for a representative of each tribe, "one man per tribe" - lamatteh, (Numbers 1:4). Indeed, in the Book of

Numbers the Hebrew word matteh (and not shevet) is used for tribe no less than 91 times! What is the reason for these two different Hebrew nouns for the very same concept of tribe? And what is the precise distinction between shevet and matteh?

According to most of our classical commentaries, shevet is to be defined as a ruling rod whereas matteh is a supporting staff. When grand-father Jacob blesses Judah, he declares, "The rod (shevet) shall not depart from Judah..." The Talmudic Sages interpret, "the rod refers to the exilarchs of Babylon, who strong-handedly (tyrannically) rule the nation with a rod; they derive their authority from the Gentile governments" (Genesis 49:10, Rashi ad loc). The Hebrew word matteh, on the other hand, is a supporting staff, as in the modern Hebrew position of RaMatKal, or Chief of Staff, with staff referring to a support group of Knowledgeable and experienced individuals. In our Book of Numbers, when Korah challenged Aaron's leadership as High Priest from the tribe of Levi, each tribe was asked by G-d to take a staff and write upon the staff the name of the prince of each tribe; on the staff of the tribe of Levi was to be written the name of Aaron. "...And behold, the staff of Aaron of the tribe of Levi flowered, a flower arose, a bud blossomed and almond fruit matured" (Numbers 17:24). The staff (matteh) of the tribe (matteh) of Levi supported Aaron's appointment as High Priest, Kohen Gadol. The best Hebrew translation of matteh is mishenet, a word used for the support staff of an elderly person with difficulty walking, and is also a Talmudic idiom for the son of a widow who serves as her aid and benefactor. This is likewise how many commentaries understand King David's psalm (23): "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leads me through green pastures...Your rod (shivtekha) and your staff (mishantekha), they comfort me". The Psalmist is saying that sometimes he feels G-d's punishing rod, and sometimes he feels G-d's supporting staff; in both cases they give him comfort, because he knows that G-d means for his well-being! (In this context, mishenet is a synonym for matteh).

In effect, the Torah is teaching us that a nation comprised of different and distinctive tribes has both negative and positive possibilities. On the one hand, a particular tribe can be desirous of unilateral control (shevet), initiating a rivalry and even war. The United States of America - the individual states being analogous to the various tribes - underwent just such a fierce and threatening Civil War.

But too centralized a governmental power can turn unity into uniformity and produce all of the tyranny of a totalitarian Tower of Babel. Different tribes - each with its own cultural flavor, temperament and specific point of view - can provide a unity with diversity, an orchestra comprised of many individual instruments, as long as there is one conductor who recognizes, respects and knows how to "orchestrate" the different sounds into one magnificent symphony. Obviously, the tribes must subscribe to a united goal and agree upon basic values, ideals and rules of conduct. But differences which are respected and which respect others can provide the breadth, depth and growth possibility which is the best defense against stagnation and tyranny. Such a system of inclusive leadership will also leave room for many more individuals to express themselves and for special interest groups to contribute and flourish.

Hence the world must have different nations, nations must have different cities (tribes, edot), cities must have different communities, communities must have different committees, and committees must have different families. It must be, in my grand-mother's words, a "velt mit veltelakh, a world with little worlds, - as long as each little world, as well as the greater world, remains committed to the integrity and inviolability of every individual and does not countenance fanatic bigotry in any form. As the prophet Micah teaches, as long as "humanity does not learn war anymore," "every individual can call upon his god and we will call upon the Lord our G-d forever." (Micah 4). Shabbat Shalom.

Ohr Torah Stone - Q & A with Rabbi Riskin

Question: I know that during the "three weeks" (between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av) one is not permitted to take part in a "joyous occasion". What is the definition of such an occasion?

Answer: Firstly, concerning the period of the “three weeks,” there is a difference in custom between Ashkenazim and Sefaradim. For Sefaradim the custom of mourning applies only from Rosh Hodesh Av, while for Ashkenazim it applies for the entire three weeks.

As to the definition of a “joyous occasion”, there are different opinions. Some prohibit any type of music during this period, including television and radio. According to Arukh ha-Shulhan as well as the tradition of my Rabbi and teacher, Rav Soloveitchik, the prohibition concerns any gathering of 3 or more men or women (who are not family members) for a joyous, social gathering that includes food and/or music. Obviously, weddings, bar-mitzvahs, bat-mitzvahs are not held during this time. If the purpose of the gathering is for study or tzeddakah (communal needs), it is permitted.

TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshat Matot - Masei

INSIGHTS - The Best Of Reasons

“Avenge the Children of Israel against the Midianim who enticed them into immorality and idol worship. Afterwards you will be gathered to your people” (22:5)

From this verse we learn that G-d made Moshe’s passing from this world contingent on the destruction of Midian. The commentaries praise Moshe for immediately taking action against Midian rather than postponing the war and extending his life. It’s difficult to conceive that Moshe, to whom G-d spoke “face to face”, would have had the remotest desire to cling to a life in this world for an extra year or two if he knew that this ran counter to the wishes of the Almighty. So what calculation could Moshe have made to suggest he delay the war and extend his life? What possible motivation could Moshe have had - and resisted - that earned him this praise?

The answer is to be found in a very similar circumstance in the book of Joshua.

G-d promised Joshua that he would not pass away until he had finished dividing the entire Land of Israel for the Jewish People. Joshua however took his time in completing the division of the Land, as it says “A long time Joshua made war with all those kings” (Joshua 11:18). As Joshua delayed the Children of Israel from settling in the Land that has ten kinds of holiness, so too G-d, measure for measure, hastened Joshua’s demise by ten years and he died not at the age of 120 like his teacher Moshe, but at 110. This was the fulfillment of the verse “Many are the thoughts in a man’s heart, but G-d’s counsel will prevail.” (Mishle 9:21)

What were the thoughts in Joshua’s heart that caused him to tarry in his task?

Joshua reasoned that it would be beneficial to the Jewish People if he did not make great haste in concluding the battle against the 31 kings of Canaan, because he knew that after his passing the Jewish People would degenerate morally and no longer serve G-d wholeheartedly. Joshua reasoned that while he was still alive he would be able to guide the Jewish People and stop this downward trend.

Moshe is known as “eved Hashem”. The word eved means “slave.” A slave is someone who ceases to have a separate identity from this master. He is so contained within his master and his master’s will, that his will and that of his master are indistinguishable.

Joshua acted for the best of reasons, but when it comes to fulfilling the word of G-d with alacrity “Many are the thoughts in a man’s heart, but G-d’s counsel will prevail.”

Source: Bamidbar Rabba 22:5

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Mattos-Masei

PARSHAS MATTOS

And you will be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael. (32.22)

We are exhorted not to give the appearance that we are sinning in any way. In the Talmud Yoma 38a, Chazal praise the Garmo family, who were the bakers of the Lechem HaPanim, Showbread, because there never was found among the members of their family any high-quality bread. This was done so that no one would ever suspect them of helping themselves to the Showbread. Their concern regarding what some jealous person might assert caused them to be extra-meticulous in their personal lifestyle. Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was known for exemplifying this trait. Never did he take advantage - nor did he permit any member of his family to benefit - from the numerous charity funds that went through his hands. This money was to be used to support the poor and needy of Yerushalayim. Even though he certainly came under the purview of the charity funds criteria, he would never avail anyone of the opportunity to talk.

Indeed, once his own granddaughter, who had been orphaned at a young age, came to him and asked for support. She was about to marry a budding young talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was penniless. She asked, “Of all the money that goes through your hands to sustain Yerushalayim’s poor, can you not find something for your own granddaughter? Why should I be less entitled to receive assistance than anyone else?”

Rav Yosef Chaim was visibly moved by her tearful request, and replied in turn, “Please do not press me further. Would you want me to break the strict rules of conduct that I have imposed upon myself? For my entire life, I have never personally gained from the funds that I administer. These funds were entrusted to me to share with others - not with myself. Our Torah demands that one remain vindicated from Hashem and Yisrael. I am prepared to sell my bed and all my personal belongings to help you in your time of need, but I will not personally take advantage of the tzeddakah money entrusted to me. I know how much you have suffered in your life, and you truly deserve Hashem’s mercy. Go in peace, and may Hashem shine His countenance upon you and grant you much joy in life, so that the wealthiest girls in town will be envious of you.”

Rav Yosef Chaim’s blessing came into fruition. His granddaughter went on to become the matriarch of a noble and beautiful family, whose sons were included among the most illustrious Torah scholars in Yerushalayim. This source of pride and comfort was more valuable than anything money could buy.

Arm men from among yourselves for the army that they be against Midyan to inflict Hashem’s revenge against Midyan. And Moshe sent them... and Pinchas ben Elazar HaKohen, to the army. (31:3,6)

Rashi comments that Pinchas went along, so that he could avenge Yosef, his mother’s ancestor. This is a reference to the time when the Midyanites sold Yosef. This statement demands clarification. The Torah clearly states that the battle with Midyan was to be fought exclusively l’shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. No vestige of personal interest was to play a role in any segment of the battle. Yet, Pinchas did possess a personal interest aside from the national cause. The Midyanites had participated in the sale of his maternal ancestor, Yosef. As Rashi indicates, Pinchas was selected specifically due to the fact that he had an issue to settle with Midyan. It is intriguing that Moshe Rabbeinu would send Pinchas on a mission that was to be carried out solely l’shem Shomayim, when, in fact, due to his personal agenda, Pinchas would be lacking in his total devotion to l’shem Shomayim.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, derives from here that Pinchas was a person whose focus was directed entirely toward Hashem. While, undoubtedly, Pinchas had personal considerations for destroying Midyan, his intentions were noble as he expunged any personal benefits which were to be gained by his actions. This might be difficult for us to grasp, because, to the average person, a division of allegiances is overwhelming. Pinchas, however, was not an average person.

Rav Rogov adds that even when Pinchas fought in order to avenge the honor and dignity of his ancestor, Yosef, he did not view the battle as some form of personal vendetta, but, rather, as one fought for the national honor of the Jewish People. Hence, avenging his honor was a step

forward in advancing the interests of the entire Jewish People. Pinchas' distinction was that he functioned on a plane in which his every intention was solely for the sake of Hashem.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, once noted that there are two mitzvos which relate to the Yom Kippur fast. There is a mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur as well as to fast on Yom Kippur. It is definitely more difficult to eat on Erev Yom Kippur l'shem Shomayim than it is to fast on Yom Kippur. Eating on Erev Yom Kippur is a mitzvah that has a side-benefit: one is eating. Thus, to fulfill the mitzvah correctly, one must be oblivious to the benefits of the food that he is ingesting. To fast on Yom Kippur, however, is obviously l'shem Shomayim, because what other motive could one have for fasting?

When Pinchas prepared for battle with Midyan, his objective was clear and unequivocally l'shem Shomayim. He could have had other motives, but Rashi tells us that he did not. This was the character of the person whom Hashem refers to as b'kano es kinaasi, "when he zealously avenged Me." (Bamidbar 25:11)

PARSHAS MAASEI

The three cities shall you designate on the (other) side of the Yarden, and three cities shall you designate in the Land of Canaan; they shall be cities of refuge. (35:14)

Rashi cites Chazal in the Talmud Makos 9a, who note that the number of Cities of Refuge in Ever haYarden was disproportionate to the number of residents. On the other side of the Yarden there were only two and one-half tribes, in contrast to the nine tribes that lived in Eretz Yisrael. Chazal explain that in Gilaad, which was in Ever haYarden, there were many killers. Ramban adds that although the Cities of Refuge were specifically for unintentional murderers, nonetheless, since there was a high incidence of intentional murder, it stands to reason that these murderers would attempt to conceal their malevolence by making their actions appear to be inadvertent. Alternatively, the Maharal explains that the mere fact that there were many intentional murderers in Gilaad indicates that there was a low regard for the value of human life. It, therefore, follows that those who were not murderers, simply tended to be negligent. Thus, there were many preventable, unintentionable killings in the area of Ever haYarden.

The environment in which one finds himself plays a compelling role in his spiritual progress. A good environment creates a positive spiritual field in which one can grow in his relationship with Hashem. In contrast, an atmosphere that is spiritually decadent will harm one's neshamah, soul. One would think that the effect of the environment is commensurate with one's direct involvement with its members and relative to his firsthand exposure to its endeavors. We derive here from the Maharal's explanation that the influence of the environment goes much deeper and is much more infectious and far-reaching than we assume. The mere fact that killers live in a city diminishes the value of human life. One becomes aware that murder is not frowned upon as much in this community, since murderers are included among its citizenry. The individual slowly becomes desensitized to the sanctity and primacy of human life. Hence, an act of unintentional murder is something that does not affect him as much as it should. This catalyzes an increase in bloodshed.

We live in a society where integrity is a medieval value, in which morality is archaic, where secular leadership, both communal and political, has redefined the meaning of ethicality and virtue. Does this not in some way impact our own thought process? The only way to counteract this influence is through awareness and insulation. Prevention is the best antidote for the influence of the environment.

He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen gadol. (35:25)

The Kohen Gadol carries some of the onus regarding the fatal accidents that occur during his watch, since he should have prayed that these accidents not occur during his tenure. Sforno explains that since there were varied forms of unintentional killings, it was almost impossible for the earthly court to determine the length of time for each individual killer's sentence of exile. Thus, it is left up to Hashem to render His judgment through the medium of an event ordained only by Him.

The responsibility of the gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, of each generation to pray for the members of their generation is awesome. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, took this responsibility very seriously, as evidenced in the following narrative. One of the young men in Ponevez, himself a child of Holocaust survivors, had a son. It did not take long before it was discovered that the infant suffered from a serious disease that plagued one of his internal organs. The parents practically lived in doctors' offices, as they went from specialist to specialist seeking whatever medical advice they could. It was during 1970 that the child went through his most difficult period. The child had to undergo a serious surgical procedure in America. The entire Ponevez yeshivah, including the Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Shach, recited Tehillim in his zchus, merit.

Indeed, the joy was palpable throughout the yeshivah when the good news of a successful surgery arrived. Rav Shach was among those who were overjoyed for the family. He added that he would continue to recite Tehillim for the child.

"Why?" the parents asked. "Baruch Hashem, the result is positive."

"Yes, I know," he replied. "I still would like to be the shomer, watchman, that everything continues to be fine."

A number of years later, the child had grown up and was now in the parshah of Shidduchim, looking for a mate with whom to share the rest of his life. The parents spoke to the intended girl's parents and encouraged them to check out the surgery that their son had received years earlier, so that everything would be clearly revealed. They suggested that besides the medical records, the parents should seek the advice of a gadol, Torah leader.

They went to Rav Shach, who, after inquiring concerning the young man's health, wished them all the best, Mazel Tov, and the young couple should merit to build a beautiful home in Yisrael amid much joy and success.

Nonetheless, the young man was not always in pure health. As Rav Shach had blessed them, they had a wonderful marriage, raising children who were bright and accomplished. The people of the neighborhood could see that this family was the beneficiary of an exceptional blessing. The father, who was Rav Shach's talmid, student, was concerned about his son's health, but nevertheless he did not worry obsessively, because of his deep abiding faith in Hashem.

Everything was fine until Mar Cheshvon 16, 2002, when the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Shach, passed away. The father was acutely aware that Rav Shach's passing would affect his son. He knew that ever since that fateful day of his surgery, the Rosh Hayeshivah had recited Tehillim daily for his son. After all, he said he would be his shomer. Now, he was gone. Shortly thereafter, the father's terrible fear was realized, as his son suddenly took ill and passed away. The shomer ne'eman, true watchman, the Rosh Hayeshivah who was so devoted to Klal Yisrael, was no longer there to intercede in his behalf.

While this thesis is about gedolei Yisrael and their responsibility to pray for the community, as parents we cannot forget our own obligation to pray for our children - and, as we age, for our grandchildren. A parent certainly prays for their child's health and success, both spiritually and materially. I feel that to the degree a parent values his child's success in the spiritual arena, to that end he will supplicate the Almighty. The Tehillim recited and the terren, tears, shed by a parent, make the difference. Above all, the child senses that the value system in his home is unique. Ruchnius, spirituality, plays a starring role in the character of the home. The following incredible story, cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in Touched by a Story 2, demonstrates a mother's prayer and the enduring effect it had on her illustrious son.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, zl, was the Torah askan, communal worker, par excellence. As president of Agudath Israel, he was the major spokesman for Orthodox Jewry for over fifty years. His total subservience to the gedolei Yisrael was legendary. It did not happen overnight. He hailed from a home whose hallmarks were Torah commitment; trust in gedolei Yisrael; and emunah peshutah, unequivocal faith in Hashem. Whenever one of the Sherer children were ill, his mother would immediately visit

the Stoliner Rebbe, zl, to ask for his blessing. His response was that she should light another Shabbos candle. She had a large family, and the ailments were typical. One could imagine that her Shabbos candle-lighting was a major endeavor.

There was another aspect of Mrs. Sherer's candle-lighting that was special. Young Moshe Sherer would silently observe his mother stand there and weep softly, as she entreated Hashem on behalf of her family. What did she say, he would wonder? Why did the candle-lighting take so long? One Friday evening, determined to find an answer to his pressing questions, he hid beneath the table on which the candles were placed. Once and for all, he was going to know what his mother was saying.

What he heard is something that remained with him - and serves as a lesson for each of us.

Since he could not fit his entire body within the cramped space beneath the table, his hands were left sticking out. His mother did not notice his hands as she approached the table to begin her weekly ritual. She recited the brachah, blessing, and accompanying prayer. She then added her own Tefillah: Ribbono Shel Olam, Baleichten zolst du di oigen fun meina kinderlach in Dein heiliga Torah. "Please, Hashem, light up my children's eyes through the precious words of Your holy Torah. Please allow them to perceive the light of Your holy Torah."

These words were spoken over and over, as she wept with total devotion. Moshe was mesmerized by what he heard. His reverie broke as one of his mother's warm tears landed in the palm of his outstretched hand. He never forgot the feeling or the impact of that warm teardrop. The teardrop wove its way into his heart and mind, as that moment left an indelible impression on him for life.

The Kohen Gadol feels a kinship to all Jews. A parent certainly feels an unabiding love for their child. Perhaps, if we all would begin to pray for others, Hashem would listen to us when we pray for ourselves.

Va'ani Tefillah

She'asah li kol tzarki - Who has provided my every need.

This brachah was originally intended to be said as one puts on his shoes. It does, however, refer to all one's needs as we recognize the Provider of these necessities. What is the meaning of kol, every/all in regard to our needs? Horav Shmuel Hominer, zl, cites the Kli Yakar who delineates between Yaakov and Eisav and the reference they made to their possessions. Eisav said, Yyeish li rav, "I have much;" Yaakov said, Yeish li kol, "I have everything." What is the difference between the two statements? Even when Eisav has everything, he still claims that he only has much - but not all. He always wants more and more. In contrast, Yaakov appreciates everything that he possesses and considers it all that he needs. He is happy with the portion that Hashem has allotted to him. This is the meaning of the blessing, "Who has provided my every need." Every person, in accordance with what he has, reflects and offers his gratitude to Hashem for granting all that he has - and needs.

Alternatively, Horav Shlomo Wolbe, Shlita, explains kol as referring to all one needs to fulfill his G-d-given purpose in this world. He cites a famous incident with Horav Naftali Amsterdam, zl, who commented to his rebbe, the venerable founder of the Mussar movement, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, "Rebbe, if I would have the mind of the Shaagas Arye, the heart of the yesod v'shoresh hoAvodah, and the character traits of the "rebbe", I would then serve Hashem properly." Rav Yisrael replied, "Reb Naftali, your purpose in life is to serve Hashem with your mind, your heart and your character traits. Be yourself!"

We thank Hashem daily for giving us the ability to be ourselves.

Sponsored by Yaakov and Karen Nisenbaum and Family In memory of our mother and grandmother Anna Nisenbaum

Rav Yonoson Sacks (Torahweb)

The Dual Nature of Tisha Ba'av

Although we observe several rabbinic fast days throughout the year, our commemoration of Tisha Ba'av is uniquely stringent. On Tisha Ba'av, like Yom Hakippurim, we begin fasting in the evening and observe all chamishah iyunim.

Tosfos Yeshanim (Megilah 5b) explains that originally Tisha Ba'av was similar to the other rabbinic fasts during which only eating and drinking were forbidden. Indeed, the navi Zechariah (8:9) equates Tisha Ba'av, the tzom hachamishi, with other yearly fasts. Only later, as a separate takanah, Tisha Ba'av was elevated to a ta'anis which parallels Yom Hakippurim.

The Ramban however maintains that initially, all fasts included the chamishah inuyim. Subsequently, however, when the harshness of other fast days were reduced, the stringencies of Tisha Ba'av remained.

The Rambam emphasizes (Peirush Hamishnayos, Maseches Ta'anis) that our observance of Tisha Ba'av reflects two distinct aspects of the day. Tisha Ba'av is not only a ta'anis tzibbur, but also a day of aveilus. Because Tisha Ba'av is a ta'anis tzibbur we refrain from eating and drinking. We sit on the floor and refrain from Torah study to mark the fact that Tisha Ba'av is a day of mourning.

The Minchas Chinuch (Mitzvah 312) suggests that the issur rechitzah, the prohibition to wash, for example, links these two elements. Both an avel as well as someone who observes a taanis tzibbur are forbidden to wash. However, whereas aveilus prohibits one from washing their entire body, taanis tzibbur forbids one from washing a small part of the body as well. The Minchas Chinuch further suggests that when Tisha Ba'av occurs on Shabbos, although the ta'anis is observed on Sunday, various aspects of aveilus apply even on Shabbos.

The Rambam extends another element of Yom Hakippurim to Tisha Ba'av. The Gemara (Yoma 81b) explains that one is obligated to begin Yom Hakippurim early, before sunset. The Torah obligation is determined from, "Veinise es nafshoseichem betisha bachodesh baerev," indicating that Yom Hakippurim is to begin on the ninth of Tishrei towards evening. Most rishonim maintain that this mitzvah is not limited to Yom Hakippurim but applies to Shabbos and yom tov as well. The Rambam does not mention the mitzvah of tosefes Shabbos and yom tov in the Perush Hamishnayos; however, he does emphasize the need to begin Tisha Ba'av early, "umosifin michol el hakodesh." According to the Rambam, the mitzvah of tosefes is not a function of kiddush hayom, but rather of taanis tzibbur.

Our commemoration of Tisha Ba'av uniquely binds these aspects of taanis tzibbur and aveilus. May our observance be meorer rachmei shomayim as we await biyas goel tzedek bimhera biyameinu.

Bar-Ilan University 's Parashat Hashavua Study Center PARASHAT MATTOT-MASSEI 5764/ 17th JULY 2004 Women's Vows

Gaby Barzilai - Bible Department

Like any other commandment in the Torah, also the commandment allowing a father or husband to annul vows made by his wife (or daughter) on the day that he hears of it (Numbers 30:4-17) has changed and developed over time in the context of the Oral Law. Some of this development goes back to Jewish sources from the Second Temple period, discovered in caves northwest of the Dead Sea, in the vicinity of Khirbet Qumran.

We shall focus on a reference to this commandment actually found in a text which is not essentially halakhic, rather philosophical-didactic. This work, discovered in Qumran and called Musar la-Mevin (Ethics for the Understanding Person), contains a lengthy passage dealing with relations between man and wife which mentions the husband's right to annul his wife's vows:

Walk together with the helpmeet of thy flesh according to the statute that a man should leave his father and his mother and should cleave to his wife...Thee has He set in authority over her, and she shall obey thy voice... And let her not make numerous vows and votive offerings; turn her spirit to thy good pleasure. And every oath binding on her, that she would vow a vow, thou shalt annul it by/according to the mere utterance of thy mouth, and at thy good pleasure restrain her from performing the rash utterance of her lips. Forgive (it) her for thine own sake. [1]

Even though the text is fragmented in several places and not every sentence can be understood, it is clear that the first part of the passage deals with the close bond between a man and his wife, and is an interpretive paraphrase of the verse: "Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Contrary, however to the spirit of equality that can be seen in the scriptural verse, the Dead Sea scroll emphasizes time and again the husband's

control over his wife. Even though this idea is not consonant with the notion of the status of women today, it is not the least bit surprising in the context of a work from the Second Temple period. At the end of the passage the author moves on to discuss the authority of husbands to annul their wives' vows, apparently citing this law as an example taken from the Bible of a husband's domination over his wife. When the author presents the law, however, he diverges from the plain sense of the biblical text in several points. For example, in Musar la-Mevin a husband's right to annul his wife's vows on the day he hears them (Num. 30:4-9) becomes a categorical directive, asserting: "and all oaths imposing a prohibition, making a vow, he annuls" so as "not to add vows and donations." The phrase in the Bible, "and the Lord will forgive her" (Num. 30:9), in Musar la-Mevin becomes an instruction to the husband: "Forgive her [] for your sake do not make man[y vows]." These changes reflect the author's negative attitude towards a wife's vows and indicate an inclination towards annulling these vows altogether. The same approach is found in another work discovered at Qumran – The Damascus Covenant (16, 10-12).

Perhaps the attitude that a wife's vows are not to be carried out should be viewed in the context of the nature of vows made by women in the First and Second Temple periods. One could argue that vows were the principal manner in which women could express their worship of G-d, since the formal mode of worshipping the Lord in the Temple was barred them. [2] It is conceivable that the proliferation of women's vows led to tension between them and their husbands, on whom the cost of paying the vows fell, and this led to the development of a halakhic trend towards annulling women's vows altogether. A similar attitude can be seen in Philo, a Jewish philosopher and commentator from the end of the Second Temple period. Philo held that by law the Torah denied women the right to have control over their vows, since often women made vows frivolously, without fully understanding their significance (On the laws in detail, 3.24-25). [3]

Examining the halakhah on this subject as it appears in the works of the Sages, we find a significant difference from the approach taken by Musar la-Mevin. The halakhic midrashim, the Mishnah and the Talmuds all hold that a husband does not have the right to annul his wife's vows unless he has special cause to do so.

[4] The recurrent phrase in these sources, "he may not annul," indicates that the Sages took the vows made by women very seriously, not as something that could be annulled lightly. Only reasons pertaining to her wife's obligations towards her husband could justify annulling her vows, and therefore a husband could only annul his wife's vow if it concerned "self-denial" or things which were "between him and her":

Why is it said: "every vow and every sworn obligation of self-denial"? Because it says, "he annuls the vow which was in force." I understand from here that there is no distinction between vows involving self-denial and vows which do not involve self-denial; therefore it is written "Every vow and every sworn obligation of self-denial may be upheld by her husband or annulled by her husband"—only with respect to vows that involve self-denial...

Whence do we learn this regarding vows between him and her? We learn it from the words, "Those are the laws that the Lord enjoined upon Moses between a man and his wife, and as between a father and his daughter." I detect no distinction between those that involve self-denial and those that do not involve self-denial? Therefore it says: "every vow and every sworn obligation of self-denial" (Sifre on Numbers, 155 [Horowitz ed., p. 206]).

This, however, is not the sole approach found in the literature of the Sages.

Other sources, bearing greater similarity to the halakhic tradition in the Qumran scrolls, come out against proliferation of vows in principle, both by women and by men.

It is taught by Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra: Anyone who makes a vow, even if he carries it out, is called a sinner. Rav Zevid said: What biblical passage proves this? "If you refrain from vowing, you incur no guilt" (Deut. 23:23); this means if you do not refrain, then there is a sin (Nedarim 77b). According to these sources, the very vow itself is viewed negatively, since obligations to Heaven are absolute and a person can never know if he or she will be able to carry out their vow. In order to avoid the grave risk of having to annul a vow, it is preferable to refrain from making vows altogether. This is an accepted view in the writings of the Sages, even though other views are occasionally presented (Hullin 2a):

After all, it is written: "whereas you incur no guilt if you refrain from vowing," and it is written: "It is better no to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill" (Eccles. 5:4). It is taught: best of all is not to vow at all, these being the words of Rabbi Meir. But Rabbi Judah says: best of all is the one makes a vow and pays it up.

Rabbi Judah takes exception to the absolute rejection of vowing expressed by Rabbi Meir. He seeks to emphasize that a vow is not intrinsically negative, but that punctilious fulfillment of vows is of the utmost importance. Both of the approaches found in the writings of the Sages have a single guiding principle, namely the great importance that the Sages attached to vows and oaths. There are two sides to this coin: on the one hand, if vows are so important and problematic,

it is preferable not to make them at all; on the other hand, if a man or a woman makes a vow, it should not be broken except in the most exceptional and well-justified circumstances.

The formal similarity which we found between a few homilies of the Sages and the ancient halakhah as it is reflected in the Qumran scrolls, does not attest to continuity of ideas or halakhah. The authors of the Qumran source annulled the vows of women deliberately out of disregard for women, whereas the Sages annulled vows in general, out of the enormous regard they had for the vow itself.

[1] The text was published by John Strugnell and Daniel Harrington in vol. 34 of the series: Discoveries in the Judean Desert (DJD). Two copies exist: 2 4Q416, iv-20 iii 11, and a b10 4Q418, 3-10. See Strugnell, J. and Harrington, D. J., Qumran Cave 4 XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2: 4QInstruction: 4Q415 ff (DJD XXXIV), Oxford 1999, pp. 110-124, 236.

[2] K. Van Der Toorn, "Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel," JBL 108 (1989), pp. 193-205. Van Der Toorn's supporting evidence comes from the ancient Near East, from contemporary anthropological studies, and from the Bible. The biblical sources supporting his view include: Ex. 38:8, I Sam. 1:10-11, 2:22, and Prov. 31:2.

[3] See the translation in Hebrew by Hava Shor, S. Daniel Nataf (ed.), Kitvei Philon ha-Alexandroni, vol. 3, Jerusalem 2000, p. 27.

[4] Sifre on Numbers, 155; Nedarim 11.1-2; Nedarim 79b, 83b; JT Nedarim 11.1.

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Parshat Matot-Mas'ei 5764 - Meaning in Mitzvot - OU.ORG

Each week we discuss one familiar halakhic practice and try to show its beauty and meaning. The columns are based on Rabbi Meir's Meaning in Mitzvot on Kitzur Shulchan Arukh

Birkhat Kohanim Without Shoes

One of the nine decrees of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai is that the Kohanim are not allowed to wear sandals when they ascend the dachan to bless the congregation (Rosh HaShana 31b). Since most of the other decrees are related to the Temple and especially to adjusting to the destruction of the Mikdash, the natural tendency would be to assume that this decree too is a commemoration of the Temple, where the Kohanim were forbidden to wear any kind of footwear. This seems to find an echo in the Rambam, who writes that the Kohanim are not allowed to wear shoes and then makes the seemingly superfluous addition, "rather they stand barefoot" (Mishneh Torah Tefilla 14:6).

However, we find that the later Sages gave a much different interpretation to this law. In Sota 40a, the gemara gives various examples of the great "awe of the public", the honor which needs to be given to the congregation. One example given is the prohibition for Kohanim to wear shoes on the dachan; Rashi explains that since the shoes are dirty it is not really respectable for the Kohanim to wear them as they bless the people. This approach finds expression in the ruling that the shoes themselves should be placed out of sight so that the congregation won't be offended by seeing them (MB 128:15), and in the rule that even socks shouldn't be worn if they are commonly worn outside and get dirty (MB 128:18).

Yet Rav Ashi, one of the latest sages of the Talmud, gives an entirely different rationale for this decree: "Lest his shoelace become untied, and when he steps aside to tie it people will say that he is the son of a divorcee", and therefore not a Kohen. For this reason even indoor shoes (such as fabric slippers) are forbidden if they have laces (Arukh HaShulchan OC 128:12).

Let us examine the factual basis for Rav Ashi's explanation. On the one hand, shoes add to our dignity. Yet they may sometimes come undone; then they become a disgrace. The Kohen would rather step aside from the dachan and endure rumors that he is not a kosher Kohen than remain on the dachan and endure the embarrassment of having everyone see his shoe untied. Evidently Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai concluded that it is better if all Kohanim dispense with shoes altogether; then there is no embarrassment in ascending the dachan barefoot. We may conjecture that shoes did not come untied so often that unsavory rumors were really a widespread problem. But the very hypothetical situation of the untied shoelaces is a symptom of a grave problem; there is something inherently wrong with our attachment to our shoes if we consider an untied shoe more of a disgrace than a blemished pedigree! In this context, even a tied shoe loses its aura of dignity; it comes to symbolize subjugation to social convention rather than human elevation. There is nothing wrong with conventions and customs, and the dignity we attach to them. But we also have to know when to put these petty observances aside and focus on our inherent human dignity. As the Kohanim ascend the dachan to bless the people, they need to put aside accouterments of mere social and conventional elevation. They should be concentrating on the unique spiritual elevation which their descent gives them, and which alone enables them to be the vehicle of the special Divine blessing of Birkhat Kohanim.

The OU/NCSY Israel Center - TORAH tidbits

The Dei'ah Vedibur
25 Tammuz 5764 - July 14, 2004
Rebbetzin Pesha Leibowitz a"h
by B. M.

The close to two thousand who attended the levaya of Rebbetzin Pesha Leibowitz—aside from the many telephone hook-ups broadcasting the hespedim—testified to the love and connection Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim's talmidim and alumni felt for their Rosh Yeshiva's wife after her petiroh on erev Rosh Chodesh Tammuz.

As Rav Naftali Portnoy, the Rebbetzin's nephew, said, "The thousands of people at the levaya of this eishes chayil, were past and present talmidei hayeshiva ranging from bochurim and young men to 65-year-old talmidei chachomim. And among this broad range of individuals were so many who felt such a personal loss . . . For the Rebbetzin was truly a mother to them . . ."

Indeed, that is the sense of loss that was most often expressed: that the thousands of talmidim of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim of the past 60 years had lost their mother, for she was truly the mother of the yeshiva. No matter how large the "family" became, she had time and concern for every one of her "children." Though she was not zoche to give birth, she was the consummate mother of thousands.

From where did Rebbetzin Leibowitz acquire her vast capabilities, her love for Torah and for those who learn it, her keen insight into the needs of others? Her lineage and her affiliation with the great luminaries of Radin provided the tools that she would employ throughout her life to accomplish her unique and lofty goals.

Solid Roots

Rebbetzin Leibowitz was born Pesha Trop in Radin in 1927 to HaRav Avrohom and Esther Trop. Rav Avrohom was named after his great ancestor, the brother of the Vilna Gaon. Rav Avrohom's father was HaRav Naftali Trop, who was the rosh yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim's yeshiva in Radin. Rebbetzin Pesha attributed much of her successes in life to the brochoh and hashpo'oh of her grandfather.

Esther (Sapir) Trop also descended from a prominent family of talmidei chachomim who later settled in Petach Tikva.

The Trops spent World War II deep in Asiatic Russia, with Rav Avrohom imprisoned in Siberia. After the war, the Trops reunited and fled to the United States, where Rav Avrohom became the rosh yeshiva of the Stoliner Yeshiva.

Several years later, Pesha married HaRav Henoch, the son of HaRav Dovid Leibowitz, a nephew of the Chofetz Chaim and a talmid of HaRav Naftali Trop. In the hesped said by HaRav Abba Zalka Gewirtz, a long-time friend of the Rosh Yeshiva, he said that the Rebbetzin's mother used to say that the Leibowitz's shidduch was actually made by special shadchanim: HaRav Naftali Trop with his talmid HaRav Dovid Leibowitz. This most appropriate shidduch bore beautiful fruits.

A Devoted Wife

After coming to America to be rosh yeshiva in Torah Vodaas, HaRav Dovid Leibowitz soon founded the Chofetz Chaim yeshiva in Williamsburg. When Pesha married HaRav Henoch he was already the rosh yeshiva, as his father had passed away. The Leibowitzes lived in Williamsburg until the yeshiva moved to Forest Hills.

In the early years, the Rebbetzin taught limudei kodesh at Breuer's High School and at Rav Avrohom Neuhouse's Bais Yaakov. She was considered a brilliant teacher. Many attested to her quick intelligence, and years later women still recalled their Morah with affection. Rav Yosef Singer, a talmid, related that he once met a woman who years before had had the Rebbetzin as a substitute for only one day, but that one day had an impact on her that she never forgot.

The Rebbetzin had been taught by Rebbetzin Vichna Kaplan, the well-known disciple of Soroh Schenirer. Rebbetzin Kaplan commented that out of the many excellent students she had taught over several decades, two students stood out: Rebbetzin Freifeld and Rebbetzin Leibowitz. Despite her success in educating girls, the Rebbetzin chose to terminate her brief career in order to devote herself to her husband and the yeshiva. The Rebbetzin spent the rest of her life helping the Rosh Yeshiva cultivate the yeshiva and the bochurim and opening branches throughout the United States and in Israel.

The Rosh Yeshiva attributed his accomplishments to the Rebbetzin. She devoted her days and nights to caring for the Rosh Yeshiva. Their family friend and doctor, Dr. Raymond Feinberg, quipped, "When the Rosh Yeshiva coughed, it hurt the Rebbetzin."

The Rosh Yeshiva would say that the Rebbetzin took care of his needs to the degree that did not have to take care of them at all.

The Yeshiva's Mother

Along with the Rebbetzin's devotion to the Rosh Yeshiva, she exhibited unusual concern for the bochurim and also for former talmidim of the yeshiva. She involved herself in their physical and spiritual welfare, and contributed significantly to their growing into bnei Torah. The talmidim looked to the

Rebbetzin as a mother. And she herself displayed the complete devotion and concern of a mother. One of the yeshiva's top talmidim did not live in the dorm, but walked home about half a mile every night. When he got engaged, the Rebbetzin's first comment was, "Soon I will be able to stop worrying about his late night walks home after seder."

Even after talmidim married and left the yeshiva, she would call on erev Shabbos to wish them a Good Shabbos. She continued to worry about them and their finances. After they had children, she would ask about them. And when former talmidim came to visit, she would ask them about other alumni, much as a mother asks a son about his brother's welfare. In recent years, the Rosh Yeshiva and the Rebbetzin rarely went away for Shabbos. One time, they had to go away. After packing and the other arrangements had all been made and they were ready to leave, the Rebbetzin heard that a certain alumnus was coming to the neighborhood for Shabbos. The Rebbetzin felt that this particular talmid could use a little encouragement. She felt that if she would run into him, she could give him the chizuk he needed. So she canceled her plans and stayed home, and then arranged to "run into" this man. The talmid who related this story commented, "This was the extent the Rebbetzin would go for other people." The Rebbetzin's unusual concern prompted many at the levaya to express their devastating feeling of loss of a mother.

Keen Insight

After the Rebbetzin's petiroh, the Rosh Yeshiva described the essence of the Rebbetzin's life. He said that she epitomized emmes and ehrlichkeit, along with the gift of binah yeseiroh. In her own learning, which she continued throughout the years, she always aimed for the true understanding. She disdained the idea of reciting the text without comprehension.

The Rebbetzin had an unusual knack for understanding the needs of others. Often, people would come to see the Rosh Yeshiva. Not wanting to overtax her husband, she would sometimes ask them to come a different time. But at times she would look at the visitor and assess that he needed to see the Rosh Yeshiva right now. She would let him in. If she felt that a bochur needed to apply himself better, she would ask him to tell her something he had learned. Or she would ask what the Rosh Yeshiva had said in the shiur. Knowing that the Rebbetzin might ask, the bochur would make sure to pay attention in the next shiur. Once, with no alternative, the yeshiva's hanholoh decided to dismiss two boys who were unruly. The Rebbetzin made a deal with the hanholoh. She agreed that the boys would not live in the dorm but she offered her basement for them to sleep in, as long as the boys could remain in the yeshiva. She gave them the extra care she felt they needed. Today, these two boys are respected rabbonim.

In fact, the Rosh Yeshiva and the Rebbetzin generally had between six and eight boys sleeping in their basement. Often, but not always, these were boys who needed a little more attention, some extra mothering. The Rebbetzin helped shape these boys into bnei Torah. The Rebbetzin had ways of helping others without them even realizing it. She would get money to people without them knowing. When she heard that people in Israel could not afford to buy clothes, she began organizing packages of secondhand clothes. She herself would bring clothes over when she and the Rosh Yeshiva took their annual trip to Eretz Yisroel. For these trips, she packed the minimum for herself but squeezed as much donated clothing as she could into as many suitcases as she could. One time after closing all of the luggage, she realized she had forgotten to include a donated coat. She immediately removed some of her own items (the few that were there) and packed in the coat. The Rebbetzin's intuitive chessed reached beyond the boundaries of the yeshiva. Once, the Rebbetzin heard that some girls in a certain school were not receiving what she felt was a full curriculum. She asked a man affiliated with the yeshiva, who had some girls in the school, if she could use his basement. There she arranged a Sunday School, which included several girls whom she taught what she felt was missing in their school. The Rebbetzin had the unique ability to relate to adults and children alike and to understand what they needed. For children who came to visit, she always had a lollipop at hand. For the adult, a listening ear.

Tasteful Simplicity

Another unusual trait the Rebbetzin exhibited was great simplicity. She always had used furniture and did not spend money on herself unless it was necessary. Her dress was simple. Nonetheless, she had an aesthetic touch within the tzimtzum. Everything about her was clean and appealing. She probably inherited this from her mother, who demonstrated this same tasteful simplicity. During the war years in Siberia, the Rebbetzin's mother took gauze bandages and made them into curtains.

Her Last Days

During her final days in the hospital, the Rebbetzin suffered greatly. However, she characteristically pushed herself aside for the needs of others. Her nephew, Rabbi Portnoy, related that soon after she suffered a stroke, he went to visit her in the emergency room. A few weeks previously she had asked him to arrange a job interview for a former talmid. The Rebbetzin's first words upon seeing Rabbi

Portnoy in the hospital, were, “Were you able to take care of the interview?” Throughout her last few weeks, she was unable to keep her food down. But when her husband came in she would control herself, not wanting to distress him. For good reason, HaRav Leibowitz would call his wife, “Mein heilige Pasha.” A maggid shiur in the yeshiva and former talmid, HaRav Reuven Hochberg, stated, “He would say that he experienced Olom Habo in this world being granted such a good wife.”

The memory of Rebbetzin Pasha Leibowitz should inspire us to emulate her ways, as she inspired so many others throughout her life.

Look who’s reaching out - Jewish Media Resources by Jonathan Rosenblum

Jerusalem Post July 15, 2004

These pages have been filled of late with lively discussions of trends within Orthodoxy, in both America and Israel, and the implications of those trends for relations between religious and secular Jews. Professor Samuel Heilman and Rabbi Berel Wein led off by analyzing the causes for the growing “harediazation” of Orthodoxy.

Professor Heilman points to the dominance of products of chareidi yeshivos (and their wives) as day school educators and in the Orthodox rabbinate; Rabbi Wein notes the greater creativity of haredim in addressing the internal needs of the Orthodox community, in such areas as ArtScroll’s monumental translation and elucidation of the Talmud.

Because of the primacy of Torah learning in the hierarchy of haredi values, teaching and the rabbinate remain respected positions within the community. And it is natural that the haredi community’s creative energies are directed to promoting Torah study and strengthening the Orthodox community. The most gifted members of the Modern Orthodox community, by contrast, tend to gravitate towards business and the learned professions. After all, they say, the attainment of professional excellence is itself a Kiddush Hashem.

Some see growing haredization as a great threat. Efraim Zuroff writes, for instance, “the approach of total segregation espoused by the right wing will undoubtedly lead to the increased alienation of mainstream American Jewry from halachic Judaism.” Describing a recent conference of young European rabbis serving relatively small European communities, “nearly [all of whom] had advanced degrees from leading universities” Michael Freund concludes that those “comfortable with the Talmud, yet conversant with Hollywood ... alone have the ability to reach out to our assimilated and intermarried brethren and bring them back to their heritage.” (emphasis added)

Yet it is demonstrably false that only the “modern” can attract secular Jews to their heritage, and that chareidi Jews have cut themselves off from their Jewish brethren. With some notable exceptions, such as the excellent work of Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald and NCSY, the overwhelming majority of outreach work in both America and Israel is done by haredim.

Every summer hundreds of married yeshiva couples and single yeshiva students, sponsored by Torah Umesorah’s Project SEED, spend their vacations establishing Torah learning programs in over seventy communities across North and South America. Many SEED programs have given rise to permanent community outreach kollelim, in communities as small as Des Moines, Iowa.

Graduates of Chafetz Chaim Yeshiva have established day schools and high schools in nearly a dozen communities, and planted Orthodox shuls in the least promising soil. Yeshiva graduates and their spouses comprise the vast bulk of the Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals.

The same pattern prevails in Israel. Over 1500 Torah scholars dedicate at least one night week, under the auspices of Lev L’Achim, to teach secular Jews any aspect of Torah in which they are interested. Lev L’Achim registers thousands of children from non-religious homes for religious education every year. SHUVU has created an entire school system for children from Russian-speaking families. Arachim conducts large weekend seminars throughout the year for Jews from all backgrounds.

At the urging of Rabbi Motti Alon and others, the Israeli national religious community has begun to take a much more activist approach to kiruv. Zohar, a group of national religious rabbis, for instance, is doing admirable work providing religious services to the secular public in areas where the religious establishment has failed, including individualized premarital counseling, performing marriages without fee, and creating High Holyday services for those unfamiliar with the Machzor.

Of course, the national religious world has always stressed concern for non-religious Jews. The assumption, however, was that influence would flow automatically from the exemplary conduct of religious Jews in the army and later the workplace. Likely familiarity with religious Jews in the army and workplace does lessen negative stereotypes about Torah life, though given the outpouring of

hatred towards those wearing knitted kippot after the Rabin assassination even this effect might be overstated.

But familiarity has not, by and large, brought many secular Jews closer to Jewish observance. Indeed that very familiarity with colleagues in the army or at work can lead secular Jews to conclude that religious and non-religious Jews are basically all alike, and religious observance is nothing more than another nuance in lifestyle.

The first prerequisite for helping secular Jews find their way back to their heritage is unconditional love for every Jew. But it requires more – above all an absolute conviction that a life of Torah and mitzvot is the best life for every Jew. There need be nothing condescending about that.

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb, former chairman of the philosophy department at Johns Hopkins University, was once asked by a Jewish Agency emissary in South Africa why he insists on wearing full Chassidic garb even in the heat of the summer. He replied that he wants his dress to convey the message that a life of mitzvah observance transforms every aspect of one’s being.

Knowledge of sports or Hollywood trivia can be a useful conversation starter, but ultimately only those who can convey a passion for Torah will ever be able to help searching Jews find the way home.

YatedUSA Parshas Mattos-Masei 13 July 16, 2004

Halacha Talk - The Nine Days

by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The Mishnah teaches that “Mishnichnas Av mema’atim b’simcha,” “When Av enters, we decrease our happiness,” (Taanis 26b). Although the Mishnah does not clarify exactly which activities are prohibited to demonstrate our decreased happiness, the Gemara (Yevamos 43a) states that one should decrease one’s business activities, refrain from construction and planting intended for joyous reasons (Yerushalmi Taanis, cited by Tosafos to Yevamos 43a s.v. Milisa), not conduct weddings and not make a festive meal to celebrate an engagement. (This is the interpretation of the Gemara as explained by the Tur Orach Chayim 551 and by the Ramban in Toras Ha’adam, cf. Rashi ad loc.)

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN CONSTRUCTION AND PLANTING FOR “JOYOUS REASONS”?

The Mishnah Berurah rules that any construction not necessary for one’s dwelling but performed for expansion is prohibited (551:12). Similarly, an improvement to the appearance of a house such as painting, hanging new drapes, wall papering and all house decorating cannot be done during the Nine Days (Piskei Tshuvos). Gardening to enhance the appearance of the property is also forbidden. However, it is permitted to weed, water or mow the lawn during the Nine Days, since these activities are not for enhancement. It is also permitted to plant and maintain a vegetable garden during the Nine Days.

MAY I EXPAND MY HOUSE DURING THE NINE DAYS TO CREATE AN ADDITIONAL APARTMENT?

This writer was asked the following shaylah: A family is building a residence for a married daughter and her family by expanding their own apartment into storage rooms and then dividing the entire area into two apartments. For the apartment to be ready on schedule, the contractor says that he needs to work during the Nine Days. Is this permitted? It would seem that it is permitted to do this expansion during the Nine Days since its purpose is to provide normal living accommodations and not for enhancement.

MAY ONE ENHANCE A SHUL DURING THE NINE DAYS?

Renovations and enhancements for purposes of a mitzvah are permitted during the Nine Days. Therefore, it is permitted to beautify and enhance a shul, yeshiva, or mikvah building or grounds during the Nine Days (Ramah 551:3). All repair work on existing structures is permitted during the Nine Days (Shulchan Aruch 551:1). Thus, even if a repair is needed as an addition to what was originally built for enhancement, it is permitted to do the repair during the Nine Days.

MAY ENHANCEMENT WORK BE PERFORMED BY A NON-JEW?

Halachically, it makes a difference whether the non-Jew is working as a Jew’s employee, or as a contractor who is paid for the job. It is forbidden to hire a non-Jewish employee to do what a Jew may not do during the Nine Days. However, if a Jew hired a non-Jewish contractor to build an addition on a Jew’s property, and the contractor wants to work during the Nine Days, the Jew is not required to prevent him from doing so (see Bach; Eliyahu Rabbah; Mishnah Berurah). Preferably, one should offer the contractor some financial compensation to refrain from working during the Nine Days, but one is not required to offer a significant amount of money to get him to wait until after Tisha B’Av (Mishnah Berurah).

WEAVING DURING THE NINE DAYS

The Talmud Yerushalmi cites an early custom not to weave during the Nine Days. The reason for this custom is very fascinating. The Hebrew word for “warp” (the lengthwise threads on a loom) is “shesi.” This word reminds us of the “shesiyah” stone, which is the foundation stone of the world on which the aron rested in the Beis HaMikdash. In order to remind ourselves that the Beis HaMikdash was

destroyed, we refrain from weaving during the Nine Days (cited by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch 551:8).

WHAT PROHIBITIONS APPLY TO CLOTHING DURING THE NINE DAYS?

One may not wear new clothes during the Nine Days, nor may one tailor or purchase new clothes or shoes (Shulchan Aruch 551:6-7). Similarly, it is prohibited to dry-clean clothes or iron them (Shulchan Aruch 551:3). We also refrain from changing tablecloths, towels, and bed linens (Shulchan Aruch 551:3). However, it is permitted to repair shoes and clothes during the Nine Days (Piskei Tshuvos 551:fn. 157). Although the Mishnah and Gemara (Taanis 26b and 29b) prohibit doing laundry and wearing freshly laundered clothing only from the Motzei Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av, the Ashkenazic custom is to refrain from Rosh Chodesh (Ramah 551:3).

Because we do not wear freshly laundered clothes during the Nine Days, one should prepare before Rosh Chodesh sufficient clothing already worn since it was last laundered. Towels should also be used at least once before Rosh Chodesh in order to allow their use during the Nine Days. If one's clothing becomes sweaty or soiled during the Nine Days, one is permitted to change into clean clothes (see Aruch HaShulchan 389:7).

It is permitted to launder children's clothes and linens until the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av (Mishnah Berurah 551:82, quoting Chayei Odom). There is a dispute among poskim until what age this applies. The Ramah is lenient and permits the laundering of all children's clothing, whereas several later poskim are stricter (see Piskei Tshuvos fn. 232, and Chanoch Lanaar, 21:2).

It is permitted to spot-clean a garment if one is concerned that the stain will set. Furthermore, it is permitted to soak a garment that is dirty without completing its laundering in order to make it easier to clean after Tisha B'Av (Piskei Tshuvos 511:18).

WHAT DO I DO IF I AM IN A HOTEL DURING THE NINE DAYS?

If someone is forbidden to use freshly laundered bed linens during the Nine Days, what does one do if one is staying in a hotel or as a guest in someone's home during the Nine Days? Is he permitted to use the freshly laundered sheets? The poskim permit guests to use fresh bed linens since most people are very uncomfortable using unlaundered bed linens slept on by someone else (Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak 10:44; Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer 13:61). The Minchas Yitzchak suggests dirtying the linens on the floor a little before using them. Depending on circumstances, one might also be able to bring one's own used linens. In any instance, one should instruct the hotel not to change the linens once he has used them (until after Tisha B'Av) since the leniency no longer applies.

PLEASURE BATHING DURING THE NINE DAYS

The Gemara does not mention any prohibition regarding bathing during the Nine Days. To quote the Ran, "Washing one's body is permitted whether in hot water or cold - and even the entire body - for chazal only prohibited washing on Tisha B'Av itself. However, meticulous people have the custom not to bathe the entire week." On the other hand, the Tur, quoting Avi Ezri, writes that the widespread custom is to forbid bathing from Rosh Chodesh until after Tisha B'Av. Furthermore, he states that one who violates this custom is in violation of "al titosh toras imecha," - do not forsake the teaching of your mother, here referring to the customs of the Jewish people. The Shulchan Aruch records two customs; one to refrain from bathing from Rosh Chodesh and the second to refrain only during the week of Tisha B'Av. The custom is to not bathe for pleasure during the entire Nine Days, but bathing for hygienic and health purposes is permitted. Arav should be consulted as to when and how this applies.

WHY IS OUR PRACTICE TO BE MORE STRINGENT THAN THEY WERE AT THE TIME OF THE GEMARA?

In the times of chazal, the memories of the Beis HaMikdash were still very fresh and a shorter period of mourning was a sufficient reminder. Unfortunately, with the golus continuing for so long, one needs a longer period of mourning to bring one into the frame of mind of mourning for the loss of the Beis HaMikdash.

WEARING SHABBOS CLOTHES

One may not wear Shabbos clothes or other unusually nice clothing during the weekdays of the Nine Days. (Our custom is to wear Shabbos clothes on Shabbos Chazon. This will be explained in more detail next week, IY"H.) A notable exception is that the celebrants of a bris are permitted to wear Shabbos clothes, since for them the mitzvah is a bit of a Yom Tov.

WHO IS CONSIDERED A CELEBRANT REGARDING THESE HALACHOS?

According to all opinions, the baby's parents, the sandek, the mohel, and the woman who brings the baby to the bris (the kvaterin) may wear Shabbos clothes (Ramah 551:1). Other opinions extend this heter to include the grandparents and other relatives (Shaarei Tshuvah end of 551:3; see also Piskei Tshuvos), as well as the people who are honored with placing the baby on the kisei shel Eliyahu, those who bring the baby closer to the bris ("cheika"), and the man who functions as the

kvatter (Eliyahu Rabbah). One should ask one's rav for direction what to do. (Incidentally, this discussion is a source that family members attending a bris the rest of the year should wear Shabbos clothes!)

EATING MEAT AND DRINKING WINE

Although the Gemara only prohibits eating meat and drinking wine on the day before Tisha B'Av, the accepted Ashkenazic practice is to refrain from eating meat and drinking wine or grape juice from Rosh Chodesh. (Many Sefardim permit eating meat on Rosh Chodesh itself, while others permit this until the Motzei Shabbos before Tisha B'Av.) Early poskim rule that someone who ignores this minhag violates the prohibition of "al titosh toras imecha," (Mordechai Taanis #639). In addition, some poskim rule that a person who eats meat or drinks wine during the Nine Days violates a Torah law since the Jewish people have accepted this custom as a vow (Aruch HaShulchan 551:23).

IF A MOURNER IS PERMITTED TO EAT MEAT, WHY IS ONE NOT PERMITTED EAT MEAT DURING THE NINE DAYS?

This is a very good question. Indeed, the halachos of mourning do not prohibit a mourner from eating meat or drinking wine. The reason one refrains from eating meat and drinking wine during the Nine Days is to remind one of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash where Hashem was served by offering korbanos of meat and wine.

An alternative reason given is that the mourning of the Nine Days is so one does not forget the loss of the Beis HaMikdash, and by forgoing meat and wine we are more likely to remember this loss (Tur Orach Chayim 552). A mourner will not forget his loss during the week of shivah, and therefore there is no need to forbid meat as a reminder.

It is permitted to eat meat at a seudas mitzvah such as on Shabbos or at a bris, pidyon haben, or siyum. People who would usually attend the seudah may join and eat meat. During the week of Tisha B'Av, only a small number of people may eat fleishig at a seudas mitzvah. For example, eating fleishig is restricted to close family members, the sandek and mohel, and an additional minyan of people.

A sick person is permitted to eat meat during the Nine Days. Similarly, someone who has a digestive disorder but can tolerate poultry may eat poultry during the Nine Days. Also, a woman who is nursing or pregnant and is having difficulty obtaining enough protein in her diet may eat poultry or meat during the Nine Days. In these situations, it is preferable for her to eat poultry rather than meat if that will satisfy her protein needs (Aruch HaShulchan 551:26).

A person who eats meat because one is ill or attending a seudas mitzvah will not violate the vow or "al titosh" discussed above because klal Yisroel accepted the minhag of not eating meat with these exceptions in mind (Aruch HaShulchan 551:26).

AT WHAT TYPE OF SIYUM IS IT PERMITTED TO EAT MEAT?

One may serve meat at a siyum where the completion of the learning coincides with the Nine Days and where one would usually serve a festive fleishig meal. One should not deliberately rush or slow down the learning in order to have a fleishig siyum during the Nine Days (Eliyahu Rabbah 551:26; Mishnah Berurah 551:73; Aruch HaShulchan 551:28). However, it is permitted to deliberately schedule a seder of learning in advance so that its siyum falls during the Nine Days if this will encourage more Torah to be learned (Aruch HaShulchan 551:28). Some poskim record that they deliberately delayed siyumim that fell during the Nine Days and celebrated them after Tisha B'Av (Aruch HaShulchan 551:28). One may not eat fleishig leftovers of a seudas mitzvah during the Nine Days (Eliyahu Rabbah 551:26; Mishnah Berurah 551:73).

Incidentally, one sees from these sources that a bris should be celebrated with a fleishig meal, because if not, why are allowances made to eat meat at a seudas bris during the Nine Days? This proves that the seudas bris is not complete without serving fleishig.

IS ONE PERMITTED TO USE WINE VINEGAR IN A RECIPE DURING THE NINE DAYS?

Yes, it is permitted to use wine vinegar since it tastes totally different from wine (Ramah 551:9).

It is also permitted to drink beer, whiskey and other alcoholic beverages during the Nine Days (see Ramah 551:11).

MAY ONE TASTE THE FOOD ON EREV SHABBOS CHAZON?

In general, it is a mitzvah of kavod Shabbos to taste the food being cooked for Shabbos to make sure that it tastes good (Magen Avraham 250:1, quoting Kisvei Ari). On Erev Shabbos during the Nine Days one may also taste the food. However, one should try not to swallow food containing meat ingredients (Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 42:61). No bracha is recited when tasting a small amount of food unless one swallows it (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 210:2).

IS IT PERMITTED TO FEED CHILDREN MEAT ON EREV SHABBOS?

In general, it is not permitted to feed children meat during the Nine Days, including erev Shabbos. Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled that if the children are fed their Shabbos evening meal before the rest of the family has accepted Shabbos, one

may feed them meat at this meal because this is their Shabbos meal (Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:21:4).

HOW DOES ONE MAKE HAVDALAH DURING THE NINE DAYS?

One recites Havdalah on wine or grape juice. If a young child present is old enough to make brachos but not old enough to understand that we do not eat meat during the Nine Days, that child should drink the Havdalah cup. If there is no such child available, the person reciting Havdalah should drink the wine or grape juice himself.

MAY ONE HAVE A FLEISHIG MELAVA MALKA DURING THE NINE DAYS?

Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled that one may not, since it is not a universal practice to have a fleishig melava malka (Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:21:4).

WHAT HAPPENS IF SOMEONE RECITES A BRACHA ON MEAT AND THEN REALIZES THAT IT IS FORBIDDEN TO EAT THE MEAT?

A person who recites a bracha on meat and then realizes that it is the Nine Days, should eat a little of the meat so that his bracha is not in vain, a bracha livatalah. Eating a tiny bit does not provide any simcha and therefore does not conflict with mourning (Sdei Chemed 5:278:5 and 368:4). Furthermore, the person is eating the meat only in order to avoid reciting a bracha in vain.

MAY ONE EAT FLEISHIG SOUP DURING THE NINE DAYS?

Although it is a dispute among poskim whether this is prohibited, Ashkenazim are strict not to eat soup made with meat or chicken. However, it is permitted to eat food cooked in a fleishig pot that contains only pareve ingredients (Mishnah Berurah 511:63).

LITIGATION DURING THE MONTH OF AV

The Gemara (Taanis 29b) teaches that a Jew who has litigation with a non-Jew should avoid scheduling the adjudication during Av, since this is a month in which the mazal for Jews is bad. Should one avoid litigation for the entire month, or only until after Tisha B'Av? Some poskim assume that one should avoid litigation the entire month of Av because the entire month has the same mazal (Magen Avraham). Other poskim rule, however, that the bad mazal is only until the 10th of Av, when the mourning period for Tisha B'Av ends, or until the 15th, which is considered a Yom Tov.

The Chasam Sofer (commentary to Shulchan Aruch) explains that Av has two different mazelos, one before Tisha B'Av and another one afterwards. While the earlier mazal is bad for the Jews, after Tisha B'Av a new mazal begins that is good for the Jews. Thus according to these opinions, there is no problem with scheduling the litigation for shortly after Tisha B'Av.

THE REWARD FOR OBSERVING THE NINE DAYS

The Medrash (Medrash Rabbah Shmos 15:21) teaches that Hashem will bring forth ten new creations in the era of Moshiach:

1. He will create a new light for the world.
2. He will bring forth a freshwater spring from Yerushalayim whose waters will heal all illness.
3. He will create trees that every month will produce new fruits that have curative powers.
4. All the cities of Eretz Yisroel will be rebuilt, including even Sodom and Amora.
5. Hashem will rebuild Yerushalayim with sapphire stone that will glow and thereby attract all the nations of the world to come and marvel at the beauty of the city.
6. The cow and the bear will graze together, and their young will play together. (See Yeshaya 11:7).
7. Hashem will make a covenant with all the creatures of the world and banish all weapons and warfare. (See Hoshea 2:20.)
8. There will be no more crying in the city of Yerushalayim.
9. Death will perish forever.
10. Everyone will be joyful, and there will be an end to all sighing or worry.

The Kaf HaChayim (551:1) states that everyone who meticulously observes the halachos of the first ten days of Av, thereby demonstrating his personal mourning over the churban of Yerushalayim, will merit to witness these ten miracles. May we all merit to see these miracles speedily and in our days.

YatedUSA Parshas Mattos-Masei July 16 , 2004

MAKING A SIYUM DURING THE NINE DAYS

By Rav Chaim Charlap, Rosh Yeshivas Bais Zvul

Adapted From His sefer, Ohr Chaim On Yomim Tovim

The Custom Of Not Eating Meat During The Nine Days

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 551:9) states: "There are those who have the custom not to eat meat or drink wine from Rosh Chodesh Av until the fast." The reason for this minhag is based on the Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 1) who states that when the month of Av enters, we are obligated to minimize our simcha. Chazal

tell us that there is no simcha without meat or wine; hence, the custom not to eat meat or drink wine during the nine days.

The Source Of Making A Siyum

The Ramah (ibid. 10) states that even during the nine days it is permissible to eat meat and drink wine at a seudas mitzvah, such as a bris milah, pidyon haben, or siyum mesechtah.

Questions

The minhag of making a siyum during the nine days raises many halachic questions. 1) Is one permitted to intentionally start a mesectah before the nine days in order to calculate its conclusion within the nine days? 2) Is one permitted to hurry or delay the siyum in order to calculate its conclusion within the nine days? 3) Who is permitted to participate in the siyum? 4) Is one who does not usually make a seudah at the conclusion of a mesectah, permitted to do so during the nine days?

Coinciding The Siyum During The Nine Days

The Mishnah Berurah (ibid.73) quotes the Elyah Rabbah that a person should not hurry or delay his learning in order to coincide the conclusion of the mesectah within the nine days. However, Rav Yaakov Emden, z"tl (siddur Ya'avetz, laws of Bein Hemetzarim), is of the opinion that although one is not permitted to delay his learning in order to coincide its conclusion during the nine days, one is permitted to hurry his learning to coincide its conclusion during the nine days, as long as it is not at the expense of understanding the Gemara. He reasons that investing more time and effort into hurrying the conclusion of a mesectah is a mitzvah. Rav Weiss, z"tl (Minchas Yitzchok vol. 2:93), is of the opinion that one may even delay the siyum until the nine days.

Furthermore, according to the words of the Elyah Rabbah, it seems that although, in his opinion, one is forbidden to hurry or delay his siyum in order to coincide with the conclusion of the nine days, one is permitted to intentionally begin a mesectah before the nine days in order to coincide its conclusion with the nine days. This was the practice of Rav Yonason Eibshitz, z"tl, to learn Mesechta Taanis in a few hours, and then eat a meat meal. (Responsa of Rav Yedidya Weil, O.C. 38).

One Who Usually Does Not Make A Siyum

The Mishnah Berurah (ibid.) quotes the Elyah Rabbah, who maintains that if one usually does not make a feast at the conclusion of a mesectah, he should perhaps not do so during the nine days. Although the Elyah Rabbah and the Mishnah Berurah both use the term "perhaps", the Chayei Adom (133:16) omits the word, implying that he is of the opinion that such a person should definitely not make a siyum during the nine days.

The Participants

The Ramah (ibid.) states: "Meat may be eaten and wine may be drunk by all those who are relevant to the seudah, however one should limit the number of participants by avoiding adding others. In the week in which Tisha B'Av falls, only a limited minyan may eat meat or drink wine."

The Mishnah Berurah (ibid.) explains that only those who would have normally participated another time at the seudah - either because they are relatives or they are fond of the person who is making the seudah - may participate during the nine days as well. However, one who would usually not participate in the seudah, and is doing so now just in order to eat meat, is guilty of a transgression if he does so.

However, during the week in which Tisha B'Av falls, apart from the relatives of the person making the seudah, who are otherwise disqualified to testify in a matter concerning him, and apart from those who are involved in the mitzvah, it is permitted to add an additional ten people to participate out of friendship.

A Siyum In A Yeshiva Or Summer Camp

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l (Laws of Bein Hazmanim by Rav Shimon Eider), rules that the whole Yeshiva or summer camp may participate in the siyum since everyone usually eats together. This is also the ruling of Rav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zt"l (Nitei Gavriel chap. 41).

Participating In A Siyum Bichorim Erev Pesach

The Mishnah Berurah (Ibid. 470:10) states that it is the custom for the first born to make a siyum mesechta Erev Pesach in order that they should not have to fast. The Mishnah Berurah adds that even those who did not learn the mesectah may participate in the seudah. The Mishnah Berurah makes no mention that only those who usually participate out of friendship may participate on Erev Pesach, as well. It is, in fact, the custom for all Bechorim to participate in the siyum, even though they would not normally do so. Rav Moshe Shternbach (T'shuvos Vehanhagos vol. 2 resp. 210) cites the Steipler, zt"l, who was also lenient in this matter.

What is the difference between a siyum Erev Pesach and a siyum during the nine days? Why, during the nine days, is participation permitted only for those who would normally attend out of friendship? One would reason that the fast on Erev Pesach should be more stringent than eating meat during the nine days, which is only a minhag.

The poskim explain the reason for being lenient on Erev Pesach is in order to ensure that the fast will not affect one's ability in performing the mitzvah of matzoh and marror. (See Aruch Hashulchan 470, Minchas Yitzchok vol. 2, 93).

A Final Note

The Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 11) states that whoever eats meat in a place where it is the custom to forbid it, is a poretz geder, v'yishchenu nachash - he is one who violates a custom and is liable to be struck by a snake.

**Please address all comments and requests to
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