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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **LECH LICHA** - 5778

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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

LECH LECHA

There is much comment and many different interpretations regarding the first two words of the second verse of this week's Torah reading. The second word "lecha" – "for you" seems to be somewhat redundant in the construction of the sentence. Rashi therefore interprets it to mean "for your benefit and good." The Lord instructs Abraham to leave his homeland and family located in Mesopotamia, in order to achieve the greatness that is inherent within him, as the forbearer of nations and the founder of the Jewish people.

There is an alternative interpretation of the use of this second word "lecha" in the verse that has always fascinated me. Travel can be a very broadening and entertaining experience. The travel industry the world over is burgeoning as people crave to visit unseen shores and exotic locations. So why would the travel of Abraham and Sarah from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan be considered by Jewish tradition to have been such a challenging test of Abraham's faith on the Almighty?

He simply was embarking on a travel experience and was one of many such travelers in his time and world. The answer lies in the fact that the word "lecha" implies permanence. Abraham, you are never going to return home to Mesopotamia again. You are not a visitor, a tourist, a traveler, but you are now a refugee, an alien, and a non-citizen.

And such a status in life is truly challenging and potentially dangerous. So, unlike the interpretation of Rashi, the word "lecha" has a certain ominous characteristic to it. Abraham and Sarah were to be truly challenged by this travel experience. They were not going on vacation.

Abraham's descendants, the Jewish people, have shared this test and challenge with him over our long history. We always were insecure and homeless during the long night of our exile and dispersal. Even countries where Jews resided for centuries, such as Spain, Germany, Poland, etc., eventually no longer would accommodate our presence. We were always a positive part of any national society we found ourselves in but at the same time we were always the odd man out.

But somehow we were able to survive this enormous test and challenge because we always believed and knew that eventually we were going to go home. We prayed for it to happen and we struggled against all odds and enemies to make it happen. And in our time it has happened. This belief of the return to Zion and Jerusalem sustained us in our darkest hours. It transferred us in our minds, though not in the minds of others, from the status of tolerated but unwanted aliens into mere visitors and sojourners who have a legitimate and permanent home elsewhere. This is the feeling I have every time I present my Israeli passport for inspection when I travel to a foreign destination. I am no longer a pariah, a refugee but merely a visitor, a tourist, perhaps even an honored guest. The children of Abraham have returned home.
Shabbat shalom

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From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit'a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day.

Here's a sample:

Blocking Road as a Form of Protest

Q: Is it permissible to block roads as a form of protest?

[There have been a lot of protests recently in Israel by a small group of Charedim called the Peleg Ha-Yerushalaim, under the leadership of Ha-Rav Shmuel Auerbach (the son of Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman), against the induction of Yeshiva students into Tzahal. Their protests are blocking traffic all around Israel.]

A: I have been asked this question many times during periods of expulsions from Yishuvim, like Gush Katif. It is completely forbidden for 5 reasons, each of which is sufficient on its own:

1. Everything must always be done according to the law.
2. The protesters are bothering people who did nothing wrong.
3. Perhaps there is a doctor in one of the cars on the way to help someone, or a person on their way to the hospital. The protester can get run over. There is no permission to risk one's life, or the life of another, in order to protest.
4. The police have to deal with the protesters instead of our enemies! And the police deal gently with the protesters instead of spraying pepper spray or tear gas or similar things which could easily disperse them. So even more police are required. And it is forbidden to cause a Jew to use force on a fellow Jew.
5. Nothing is accomplished in the State of Israel by force. Decisions are made only by Jews talking one another.

In sum: Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah said that public struggle may only be undertaken without violence, without insults and without hatred (Le-Netivot Yisrael Vol. 1 in the article "Et Achai Anochi Mevakesh").

Loving Hashem and My Husband

Q: Who should I love more - Hashem or my husband?

A: Love of Hashem is also revealed through the love of your husband.

Hanging Bread on a Garbage Can

Q: Why do people hang left-over bread in a plastic bag on garbage cans instead of just throwing it out?

A: There is no good reason for doing so, since no one is going to take the bread from there to eat it. It is forbidden to throw bread away in a

disgraceful manner. Therefore, one should try to buy bread in a reasonable quantity that will then not necessitate having to throw any away. If there is no choice, then it should be disposed of in a respectful manner, i.e. by wrapping it in two plastic bags and placing it in the garbage. See Piskei Teshuvot 171:3. In the contrary, the Gemara in Pesachim (111:2) says that one should not hang bread, especially here, since it is in a disgraceful manner (See Kaf Ha-Chaim 180:14. Maor Ha-Shabbat Volume 2, Penini Ha-Maor 30:4 in the name of Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach).

Swordfish

Q: Is swordfish Kosher?

A: It is a dispute. The question arises since its scales fall off. Although the Knesset Ha-Gedolah permits it, it is unclear whether he is discussing the same fish which we call "sword fish" today. There are others who also permit it (Shut Shevet Me-Yehudah Volume 2 5:118. Divrei Ha-Rav p. 192 in the name of Ha-Rav Soloveitchik), but the majority of Poskim forbid it (see Shut Tzitz Eliezer 9:40).

Second Marriage

Q: The Gemara in Sotah (2a) says that 40 days before a fetus is formed, a voice from Heaven announces the daughter of "this" person will marry "this" man (i.e. each person has a Beshert, a soul-mate). If so, how does a widower get married a second time?

A: He marries a woman who is not his Beshert (and he is not hers), but with whom he can still build a household. As it says: "G-d makes the solitary dwell in a house" (Tehillim 68:7. Ramchal).

Tefillin After Accepting Early Shabbat

Q: If someone accepts Shabbat early and then realizes that he did not put on Tefillin on Friday, can he put them on before sundown begins?

A: Yes. There are certain actions which our Sages allowed during twilight, and all the more so if he accepted Shabbat early, and all the more so for Tefillin.

Permanent Make-Up

Q: It is permissible for a woman to have permanent make-up?

A: It is permissible if it is to hide an aesthetic blemish, such as a scar, sparse hair or lack of eyebrows, since it is not actually permanent but rather only for a few years. If, however, it is to add beauty, it is forbidden. Taharat Ha-Bayit of Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef Volume 3 pp. 29-34.

Blessing over Birkat Ha-Mazon

Q: Why isn't there a blessing over Birkat Ha-Mazon, which is a Torah Mitzvah, "And you should eat, be satisfied and bless" (Devarim 8:10)?

A: We do not recite a blessing over a blessing (Ha-Gaon Rabbi Yaakov Mi-Lisa, author of Chavot Da'at, in his commentary on the Haggadah. Likutei Shoshanim pp. 13-15).

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Lech Lecha: The Inner Will of the Universe – Rav Kook Abraham, the Sages noted, was the first person in history to address God as “My Master” (Gen. 15:8)

What makes this event so noteworthy?

Completing the Master's Work

We must first understand the essence of the servant-master relationship. The servant fulfills the wishes of his master by completing the master's work. The servant is an extension of his master, his shaliach or agent. When the servant acts, it is as if the master has acted.

Before Abraham, people acknowledged the existence of a Prime Mover, an infinite Being Who created the universe. But they could not fathom how a truly perfect Being would be concerned with an imperfect and lowly world such as ours. Why would God, transcendent beyond all things, be involved in the smallest details of the workings of the universe?

They failed to recognize that an integral aspect of creation - its inner core - is that the universe aspires to perfect itself. This underlying aspiration for perfection and the world's gradual moral progression is by plan and purpose; thus Divine providence governs all moral paths in the world, even the smallest and least significant.

The central conduit for the universe's pursuit of perfection is mankind's efforts to elevate its deeds, traits, and thoughts. We have free will to choose good or evil. And that which leads us to choose good over evil is God's will stamped in creation, resulting in the universe's inner aspiration to perfection. By declaring God as his Master, Abraham publicly proclaimed that God governs the world and desires its moral perfection. God wills that we should be His agents in bringing about the world's gradual advancement.

As we work toward our own personal spiritual growth, we promote the work of our Master - the spiritual elevation of the entire universe.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 33 on Berachot 7b (I:77))

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

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Inner-Directedness (Lech Lecha 5778) – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Covenant & Conversation

Is character strictly personal – either you are or aren't calm, courageous, charismatic – or does culture have a part to play? Does when and where you live make a difference to the kind of person you become?

That was the question posed by three great American-Jewish sociologists, David Reisman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney in their 1950 classic, *The Lonely Crowd*. Their argument was that particular kinds of historical circumstance give rise to particular kinds of people. It makes a difference, they said, whether you lived in a society with a high birth- and death-rate – where families had many children but life expectancy was short – or one on the brink of growth, or one in the early stages of decline. Each gave rise to its own type of character: not that everyone was the same but that you could discern certain traits in the population and culture as a whole.

High birth- and death-rate societies, such as non-industrialised societies or Europe in the Middle Ages, tend to give rise to tradition-directed people: people who do what they do because that is how things have always been done. In these societies – often highly hierarchical – the primary struggle is to stay alive. Order is preserved by ensuring that people stick rigidly to rules and roles. Failure to do so gives rise to shame.

Societies on the brink of growth – transitional societies, such as Europe during the Renaissance and the Reformation – produce inner-directed types. Culture is in a state of change. There is high personal mobility. There is a mood of invention and exploration. This means that people have constantly to adapt to new challenges without losing a sense of where they are going and why, which means facing the future while keeping faith with the past. Such societies pay great attention to education. The young internalise the values of the group, which stay with them through life as a way of navigating change without disorientation or dislocation. They carry their inner world with them whatever they do and wherever they go. Failure in such societies is marked not by shame but by guilt.

Finally come the societies that have already achieved maximal growth and are on the brink of decline. Life expectancy has risen. The birth-rate falls. There is affluence. Much of the burden of care has been taken over by centralised agencies. There is less need for the driven, focused, resilient inner-directed types of an earlier age. The mood is no longer of scarcity but of abundance. The primary problem is not dealing with the material environment; it is getting on with and winning the approval of others. That is when the third character type emerges: the other-directed individual. Such people are more influenced by others in their age group, and by the media, than by their parents. Their source of direction in life is neither tradition nor internalised conscience but instead, contemporary culture. Other-directed

people seek not so much to be esteemed but to be loved. When they fail, they feel not shame or guilt but anxiety.

Already by 1950, Riesman and his colleagues believed that this new, third character-type was emerging in the America of their day. By now, thanks to the spread of social media and the collapse of structures of authority, the process has gone far further and has now spread throughout the West. Ours is the age of the Facebook profile, the vivid symbol of other-directedness. Whether or not this is sustainable is an open question. But this insightful study helps us understand what is at stake in the opening of our parsha, the words that brought the Jewish people into being:

The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, your birthplace and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen. 12:1) Abraham was commanded to leave behind the sources of both tradition-directedness ("your father's house") and other-directedness ("your land, your birthplace"). He was about to become the father of an inner-directed people. His entire life was governed by an inner voice, the voice of God. He did not behave the way he did because that is how people had always acted, nor did he conform to the customs of his age. He had the courage to "be on one side while all the rest of the world was on the other." [1] His mission, as we read in next week's parsha, was to "instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Gen. 18:19), so that they too would carry with them the inner voice wherever they went. Theirs was a morality of righteousness-and-guilt, not honour-and-shame or conformism-and-anxiety. Hence the centrality of education in Judaism, since Jews would have to hold fast to their values even when they were a minority in a culture whose values were diametrically opposed to their own.

Hence the astonishing resilience of Jews throughout the ages, and their ability to survive change, insecurity, even catastrophe. People whose values are indelibly engraved in their minds and souls can stand firm against the majority and persist in their identity even when others are losing theirs. It was that inner voice that guided the patriarchs and matriarchs throughout the book of Genesis – long before they had become a nation in their own right, and before the more public miracles of the book of Exodus.

Jewish identity is that inner voice, learned in childhood, reinforced by lifelong study, rehearsed daily in ritual and prayer. That is what gives us a sense of direction in life. It gives us the confidence of knowing that Judaism, virtually alone among the cultures and civilisations of its day, has survived while the rest have been consigned to history. It is what allows us to avoid the false turns and temptations of the present, while availing ourselves of its genuine benefits and blessings.

Inner-directed people tend to be pioneers, exploring the new and unknown even while keeping faith with the old. Consider, for example, the fact that in 2015 Time Magazine identified Jerusalem, one of the world's most ancient religious centres, as one of the world's five fastest-growing centres for hi-tech start-ups. Tradition-directed people live in the past. Other-directed people live in the present. But inner-directed people carry the past into the present, which is how they have the confidence to build the future.

This life-changing idea of inner-directedness – the courage to be different – began with the words *Lech lecha*, which could be translated as "Go to yourself." This means: follow the inner voice, as did those who came before you, continuing their journey by bringing timeless values to a rapidly-changing world.

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

OU Torah

One Day We Will All Be Together

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

I picked him up at the airport. He was arriving in Baltimore, where I was then a rabbi, to deliver an address and then return home to New York.

The plane was late, so that when he came, I told him that we would have to hurry to be at our destination on time. He was already showing signs of age, so that walking quickly was hard for him. We moved rapidly past the gates, at which other flights were disembarking, including one at which the arriving passengers were being welcomed warmly by friends and family.

That is where he stopped, transfixed. He could not take his eyes off the scene of the small crowds embracing and kissing each other tearfully and emotionally.

Reluctantly, he responded to my rude insistence that we move on, and together we rushed to his appointment.

He was Rav Avrohom Pam, of blessed memory, the late lamented sage, Yeshiva dean, mentor to hundreds of rabbis and scholars, and above all, gentle soul. When we finally were in the car and on our way, I asked him what it was about the airport scene that so fascinated him.

His response was the greatest lesson of the many I learned from him. "The saddest of all human happenings is separation," he said. "And the most wonderful of all is reunion. Whenever I see people, of whatever religion or background, who are joyfully coming together after a long separation, I feel 'spellbound' (that was the word he used), and I must stand by and witness that pure innocent joy as long as I can."

What a powerful teaching! Separation is the greatest human tragedy, although a very common one. Reunion is the greatest joy, rare though it often is.

This week's Torah portion, *Lech Lecha*, allows us to further reflect upon the phenomenon of separation, in Hebrew, *p'reida*. The Torah describes the close relationship between Abraham and his nephew, Lot. It is a relationship which began in the "old country" and continued through Abraham's adventurous journey to and through the Land of Canaan. As both prospered, we are told, "Thus they parted from each other; Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot... pitched his tents near Sodom."

This decision to separate was a fateful one for Lot. He settled in Sodom, rose to a prestigious position there, and we will yet learn more about his new life in next week's portion. He tried to mitigate the effects of the separation by remaining loyal to the precepts he learned in Abraham's tent, a difficult challenge in his new circumstances.

At the same time, Abraham did not forget his nephew. Even after the separation, he stayed in touch with him from afar and rushed to his aid when Lot was captured by a marauding army.

This dramatic story of the separation of two close companions may be the first on record, but it is certainly not the last. Subsequent separation dramas are themes of great literary fiction, and of real human life, which is even stranger than fiction. Sometimes the separation results in estrangement and alienation; sometimes, despite the distance, the separated parties end up in remarkably similar places.

Personally, I have long been intrigued by the stories of siblings separated at an early age who rediscover each other later in life. Often, they learn how different they have become. One example is the reunion of the ninety-year-old Torah sage, Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky, who, after a seventy-year separation, rediscovered his sister in the former Soviet Union. He was steeped in traditional Judaism; she had become totally removed from any semblance of Jewish religion. When one of Reb Yaakov's sons tried to explain to his long-lost aunt what her brother had accomplished in his life, she could only respond that it was a shame that a lad with such youthful promise grew up to become a mere melamed, a school teacher.

But there are poignant examples of separated individuals who, despite growing up in radically different environments, end up so similarly. How well I remember an adolescent psychotherapy patient of mine who was adopted in infancy by a professor of physics and his wife, a noted art historian. They were frustrated by this teenager, who was interested neither in intellectual nor cultural pursuits, but whose goal in life it was to become a fireman, and who spent all his spare time as a fire department volunteer.

After several years, I received a call from the young man telling me that he had since successfully located his biological father. Wouldn't you know that his father was a veteran fireman!

Separation is part of human life, so much so that in Jewish mystical liturgy this world is called the "world of separation," *alma d'piruda*.

Reunions, planned or serendipitous, are thrilling experiences but are frightening because we fear finding out how different we have become from those with whom we once shared such similarity. Abraham and Lot once were very similar. They separated, intentionally. Yet there were bonds that linked them, invisible and mysterious bonds. Of some, we read in the Torah portions of this week and next, but others surface generations later, with the story of Ruth, the descendent of Lot's grandson, Moab, and her reunion with Abraham's people. Ultimately, King David himself becomes the symbol of the reunion of the uncle and nephew of whose separation we read this Shabbat.

No wonder then, that the mystical text that calls this world the *alma d'piruda*, calls the next, better world the *alma d'yichuda*, "the world of reunion", the world in which we will all be together.

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Rabbi Yissochar Frand

Have Mission — Will Travel, But Only Reluctantly

A famous Medrash in Parshas Lech Lecha teaches: Rabbi Levi says that the term "lech lecha" [go forth] appears twice — once in this week's parsha [Bereshis 12:1] and once in next week's parsha [Bereshis 22:2]. Here, the context is Hashem telling Avraham to leave his homeland and to go to the land that he will be shown. In Parshas Vayera, the context is Hashem telling Avraham to go sacrifice his son on Mt. Moriah. The Medrash states that we would not know which "lech lecha is more important, which is dearer ("yoser chaviv"). However, since the Torah specifies the destination of the second lech lecha (to Mt. Moriah) and does not specify the destination in this week's parsha (where it merely says "to the land that I will show you"), we see that the second lech lecha is more chaviv.

In truth, it is very hard to understand the question of the Medrash. How could the Medrash contemplate that the lech lecha in our parsha was "dearer" than the lech lecha of Akeidas Yitzchak? The latter command was clearly a greater nisayon [test] of Avraham's faith in the Almighty! Indeed the Akeida is the pinnacle of a series of tests that Avraham had already successfully passed. It would not make sense to test him with a "lesser test" after he already successfully passed greater nisyonos. Of course, as the Medrash concludes, the second lech lecha was greater. However, our question is how the Medrash could have ever raised the question in the first place. (What is the *hava amina* of the Medrash?)

The sefer Shemen HaTov addresses this question, and I would like to elaborate a bit on what he says.

There is a very famous Rambam which chronicles the history of Avodah Zarah in the world. How did it happen that humanity became corrupt, abandoning the One Creator in favor of idols? The Rambam explains that initially people felt it was appropriate to pay homage to the heavenly bodies because they are the emissaries of the Creator of the World. Eventually, people got further off the track and attributed independent power to the stars, the sun and the moon. The Rambam traces the whole history of humanity, explaining how Avodah Zarah began. [Hilchos Avodas Kochavim 1:1-2] In Halacha 3 there, the Rambam introduces Avraham Avinu into the picture. As a young boy, Avraham started wondering. How could it be that there is no one controlling this entire universe? The numerous and wondrous natural phenomenon could not all be occurring by themselves. The Rambam emphasizes that Avraham had no teacher or mentor to instruct him in these matters. He was immersed amongst the foolish population of Ur Kasdim, where everyone — including his parents — were idol worshippers. As a

young boy, he went along with society and worshipped Avodah Zarah himself, but he was troubled by all this. Eventually, Avraham came to the understanding that there must be a G-d, and that the entire world was in error. According to the Rambam, Avraham was 40 years old when he "recognized his Creator."

The Rambam continues that once Avraham came to this conclusion, he entered into polemics with the people of Ur Kasdim. He got into discussions, and tried to convince members of the society in which he grew up that they were in error by worshipping idols. He broke idols, and insisted that it was unworthy to worship anything other than the Creator of the World. The Rambam then says that when Avraham bested the people with his arguments, the king attempted to kill him. The king threw Avraham into a fiery pit, from which he emerged miraculously, and he left Ur Kasdim for Charan. In Charan too, he continued his mission and proclaimed to the entire population that there was One G-d, and to Him alone it is fitting to pray. He gathered a following, going from city to city and from country to country, until he reached the Land of Canaan. In short, this individual who began wondering when yet a child about the nature of the universe, brought belief in monotheism to the peoples and countries, wherever he travelled.

Think of a modern day scenario. Imagine a rabbi in some little town, away from the Torah centers of America, who is successful in bringing Yiddishkeit to the people in his town. Perhaps he has influenced hundreds and hundreds of people to become Baalei Teshuva. He is the address for Yiddishkeit, not only in his own little town, but also in his entire state, and perhaps even in the whole region, where he travels widely. Then he receives an offer from someone who tells him "I want you to move back east. I want to offer you a job in New York or Baltimore or Lakewood." His initial response will be "But what will be with all the people I have brought close to Judaism? If I leave here, it is all going to fall apart!" This would be a terrible dilemma for him.

Multiply this scenario to compare it to Avraham's situation. His whole life's work was spreading the Word. Then the Ribono shel Olam tells him, "Leave your land, your birthplace, the house of your father, and go to the land I will show you." Hashem wants him to leave his territory. Avraham Avinu needs to be worried about what is going to be with all those people whom he has successfully influenced. His life's work will go down the drain. What will become of those people — "the souls he made in Charan"?

This is a tremendous nisayon for anyone, and certainly for an Avraham Avinu. It is enough of a nisayon to cause the Medrash to contemplate for a moment which of the two "lech lecha" commands was more difficult. True, at the end of the day, the Medrash concludes that the Akeida was the greater challenge, but at least in light of what we have explained, we can understand that there was a legitimate reason for the Medrash to have posed the question. (We can appreciate the *hava amina*.)

This is similar to a concept we mentioned in previous years. In next week's parsha, we read that Hashem appeared to Avraham in the "plains of Mamre." Chazal say that Mamre was the one who gave Avraham counsel that he should go ahead and circumcise himself, when Avraham had a doubt as to whether he should go through with it or not. We also raised a similar issue there. Avraham was willing to do anything the Almighty commanded him. However, here when Hashem told Avraham to circumcise himself, Chazal imply that Avraham suddenly needed to ask his friend for advice about whether to carry out this command. Strange, to say the least!

We suggested that certainly Avraham intended to follow Hashem's command to circumcise himself. His only question was whether to do this publicly or privately. Mamre advised him to do it publicly.

What was the basis of Avraham's question? His question was that once he performed the milah on himself, he would be different from everyone else. He was afraid that he would lose his ability to relate to people. His whole *raison d'être* was for people to get close to him so that he could influence them towards monotheism. Avraham was very hesitant to do anything that might jeopardize his ability to influence people. Until then, people would say, "he is one of us." That allowed him to be effective in his "kiruv work."

He knew that becoming circumcised would make him “different,” so he considered carrying out the command of G-d privately, so that people would be unaware of his “difference.”

This is basically the same concept. Avraham’s life was bringing the concept of the True G-d to the masses, and anything which might inhibit his ability to influence people was a major nisayon for him.

With this background, we can understand another idea. The Gemara states [Avoda Zara, 9a] that the world will exist for 6,000 years, after which we will enter a period called “the World to Come.” (The clock is ticking, and we are relatively near the end of these six millenia.) The Gemara partitions this six-thousand-year period of world history into three segments: two thousand years of Nothingness (Tohu); two thousand years of Torah; and two thousand years of Messianic Time.

Most people would guess that the two-thousand-year period of “Torah” began with the revelation at Sinai. However, the Gemara there pegs the start of the period of two thousand years of Torah with the era when Avraham gathered souls in Charan, while preaching the truth of monotheism.

Rav Asher Weiss, in his sefer on Chumash, asks the following: There was Torah before Avraham Avinu. Noach learned Torah. There was even a functioning yeshiva — the Yeshiva of Shem v’Ever. So what does the Gemara mean when it says that the two-thousand-year era of Torah began with “the souls Avraham established in Charan?” Rav Weiss answers by quoting a statement of the Kesef Mishna on the aforementioned Rambam. The Kesef Mishna acknowledges that there was Torah before Avraham, but Avraham introduced a new dimension to Torah with his activities.

The roles of Shem and Ever as mentors were limited to those people who showed up and learned in their yeshiva. It was not an institution meant for the masses. The period of Torah began when Avraham Avinu came and publicly proclaimed to the masses belief in monotheism. This means that the definition of Torah is not only the Torah that is learned in the confines of the Beis HaMedrash, but it is Torah that is made accessible to the masses as well. Thus, Avraham, who made the Torah accessible to the masses, initiated the period of Torah.

This life mission was so important to Avraham Avinu, that the nisayon of lech lecha and giving up the community of followers he had assembled in Charan was extremely challenging, to the extent that the Medrash had to tell us that despite the difficulty of this test, the test of the Akeida was even greater.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Lech Lecha

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In this week’s portion, Hashem challenges his loyal follower Avram to a most difficult task.

“He took him outside and said, ‘Gaze up at the heavens and count the stars if you able to.’ Then G-d said, ‘thus shall be your children’” (Genesis 15:5). Hashem says count the stars if you can, and then concludes that thus shall be your children. What is thus referring to? If it is a reference to the amount of stars, then why did Hashem tell Avram to attempt to count them? Surely they both knew it was an impossible task for a mortal being. In addition, from the sentence structure it would appear that the word thus may actually refer to the impossible attempt to count the stars?

Many people assume that Hashem assured Avram that his children will be as numerous as the stars, but those words were never spoken. After all, there may be more stars in heaven than people on earth!

Perhaps then, it is not the actual number of stars that personify the Jews but the attempt to count and understand them. The constant curiosity and mystery that surround the galaxies are the metaphor for the Chosen People. Rabbi Yosef Weiss, in his recently published work Visions of Greatness, tells the story of one Sam Goldish, an observant Jew who lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma and works for the United States Department of Defense.

Working on a major government contract, Sam was involved in a major project that needed constant defense department scrutiny. Huddled with a dozen co-workers examining structural modifications for a tank, one worker mentioned that there was a string hanging from Sam’s pants. He offered to remove it, and Sam, eyes fixed on the schematics, nodded his approval. What happened next was more significant. The co-worker tugged innocently at the string and it did not yield. In fact, seven other strings followed. Sam’s tzitzit were revealed. The startled workers gasped. They had never seen that sort of sartorial ornament.

For the next hour, a debate among a dozen gentile workers ensued – in the heart of the Christian Bible belt – all about whether or not Jews must wear fringes. Each worker claimed to be an authority on Jews, each said they knew the religion and were well versed in its customs — yet no one had heard of tzitzit! They refused to return to the meeting until Sam showed them, in a King James edition of the Bible, that one of the workers had on hand, exactly where in the Bible it stated that Jews are to wear fringes on the corners of their garments.

The fascination with the little strings far surpassed their interest in the army’s latest tanks.

Perhaps Mark Twain asked it best:

“If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

G-d assures Avram that the interest in his kin will rival man’s fixation with the starry worlds that he will never reach. The intrigue that surrounds the Jew is inversely proportional to the space he fills in the universe. No matter how tiny the glow of Judaism may seem, civilizations study it, societies try to imitate it, and mystified as they are, some nations try to destroy it. The proverbial Hubble telescopes of the gentile world will be just as fascinated, fixated, and constantly occupied in utter mystery of the immortal and indestructible lights that twinkle past the dark clouds of civilization – the Jew. And though those gentile observers may never discover the answer to our immortality, nor understand the reason of or resilience, one thing they will surely understand – we shine.

Good Shabbos!

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Parashas Lech Lecha תשע"ה
Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

לך לך ... ואעשך לגוי גדול

Go for yourself... and I will make of you a great nation. (12:1,2)

The term/class/status, minority, implies deficiency to a certain extent.

Indeed, in contemporary society (and probably much earlier), the appellation, minority, relegates its members, or member, to an implied second-class status. This, of course, is dependent on the individual or individuals who fall under this status, either imposed by the members of the majority or self-imposed – due to a desire to segregate themselves from the majority. Having said this, we will analyze our People's status – both vis-à-vis the world community and among ourselves.

Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, lived during a period of turmoil within the Jewish community of Germany and, by extension, Western Europe. The scourge of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, had begun to rear its head following the French Revolution, and Jews were falling prey to its allure. They preached assimilation: Why remain a minority against the entire world? Why be different? The average Jew, whose level of education matched the pride he had in his heritage, had long ago succumbed to the economic and social hardships that have challenged our People at every juncture, gobbled up their poisonous rhetoric and soon thereafter reneged his commitment to Judaism. *Rav Hirsch* succeeded in stemming the tide and, ultimately, reversing the trend. He taught them that for a Jew to be a minority is a privilege, an honor, and an integral aspect of his identity.

Avraham Avinu established this principle when he listened to Hashem's call of, *Lech Lecha*, "Go for yourself!" – go your own way. Do not concern yourself with what others will think. Do not fear isolation – not if it means separating yourself from hedonistic pagans bent on destroying the very fibre of moral values, the core principles upon which the nation of which you will be the progenitor will build their future. Without morals, we are not a nation; indeed, we are not human. It is no less true today than it was thousands of years ago, when our Patriarch had to stand up for what was proper and true.

It was a time in which isolation was denigrated. The *dor haflagah*, generation of the Dispersion, declared, *Naase lanu shem*, "Let us make ourselves a name." They built a tower to glorify their collective selves – not the individual. It was all about centralization – not individual self-worth. Centralization recognized the group – not the status of the individual who was merely an underling, a cog in the wheel, a brick in the cooperative structure. This concept, explains *Rav Hirsch*, gives rise to the false notion that the majority holds the power of authority and that everything which the majority decides is good is automatically considered good and mutually accepted by the group.

Judaism believes in the power of the majority, but this is only when it represents all that is truly sacred and sublime. When the majority expounds and is attached to the sacred truth, then we join with them in total harmony. If not, then we adhere to the principle of *lech lecha*, go your own way. We do not determine the veracity or suitability of our actions based upon those idolized by the majority. Our Patriarch *Avraham* taught us, by example, that the majority does not have the power to hold sway over the individual.

We have survived throughout the millennia because we are imbued with *Avraham Avinu's* courage to be a minority. This was the very first Jewish directive: Stand up for what is just and proper. If it is not the paradigm of absolute truth – leave! We do not "go with the flow." It takes courage, resolution, and conviction. It requires strength – not physical prowess, but emotional stamina. Hashem said to *Avraham*, *V'e'escha l'goi gadol*, "I will make you into a great nation," not a large nation – a great nation. We are measured by quality – not by quantity. We stand alone, as a minority, singular in our belief, proud of our heritage, and strong in our relationship with Hashem – which takes precedence over everything.

When a Jew feels the need to impress; to be accepted on par with everyone else, to follow the pattern of life and perspective which has become the

standard of the minority – then this Jew is deficient in his Judaism. What could be more satisfying than walking with G-d? What could be more edifying than daring to be alone? What could be greater than being a member of the nation made great by G-d?

Lech lecha: go for yourself. This is the reason that some have difficulty reconciling themselves with being in the minority, with standing resolute against the allure and misguided beliefs of the majority. In order to "go for yourself," one must know and acknowledge himself/herself. One must come to terms with who he/she is. One must confront his/her own identity. If one does not know his/her *lecha/yourself*, then the *lech* – "go" – is of no value.

ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן

And the souls they made in Charan. (12:5)

Avraham Avinu was the *amud ha'chesed*, pillar of kindness. What was his greatest kindness? It was reaching out to people and teaching them about Hashem. To save a person from the clutches of idol worship and inculcate him with belief in monotheism is the greatest act of kindness, because this person has been saved – not only spiritually, but physically as well. We involve ourselves in all forms of *chesed* projects, but the most basic act of reaching out to our estranged brethren seems to elude us. This is especially true if the subject is in an environment that is foreign to us or does not sit well with our sensitivities. People that are in restricted environments; those who are unwell and infirm; those who are victims of various forms of abuse and addiction: are at the bottom of the list of those whom we are prepared to help. When our acts of *chesed* are prefixed with dollar signs, a preference criteria of whom we will help and when – our *chesed* is really self-focused and not worth very much. *Avraham Avinu* set the standards for *chesed*; he had no criteria and no preferences. He reached out to everyone, whenever, and wherever and whomever needed him.

Why is it that many observant, good people, who are well-meaning and sensitive, shy away from acts of *chesed* to those who just do not fit in their comfort zones? For some reason, we Jews have the ability to live a life filled with contradictions. Some will call this modern or centrist, when, in fact, it is a life of contradictions. We will go out of our way to perform acts of kindness, but, if the beneficiary does not fit into our guidelines for humanity, we will defer to others – at times, those who are not observant.

I read about the funeral arrangements for Cardinal Jean-Marie Listiger, the long-time Archbishop of France. He was a confidante of Pope John Paul II and had risen to a pinnacle in the Catholic Church, a level which is attained by only a select few. So what was so special about this? People work diligently and remain focused on achieving a specific goal; is it that strange if they make it? This would be true had Cardinal Listiger been born a devout Catholic. He was, however, born a Jew! As a fourteen year-old boy, he hid in a convent in France while his mother was murdered in Auschwitz. It is well-known that he kept his parents' *yahrzeits* and even recited *Kaddish* for them. He asked that the *Kaddish* be recited for him at his funeral in front of Notre Dame! Now, that is a contradiction! Was he the first to live a life of contradiction? Certainly not, and, sad to say, he was not the last.

Chesed is founded upon the principle of care, sensitivity, empathy; its basic foundation does not allow for the "convenience" of contradiction. Yet, there are those whose attitude toward *chesed* is filled with contradictions. If they are following the standard set forth by our Patriarch, then they had better check their GPS. Our Patriarch was *yashar*, straight, and did not sway or wane in his commitment. Why do we?

At times, the most difficult question can be elucidated with a simple answer. I think the greatest *chesed* that we can perform for someone is to attempt to figure out what makes him tick, what drives him to act in a different manner. In other words, are we prepared to understand and accept another person's situation? True, he may act in a weird manner, but he might have a good reason for his strange behavior. The fellow that has been locked away for various felonies, both moral and ethical, which might make us cringe (and they should!) or infringe upon our sensibilities, has a criminal history and

pathology that have brought him to this stage. Perhaps if we try to comprehend his situation, we might understand his mindset. This, I think is the greatest act of *chesed*. This is empathy at its apex. While this might be the author's personal perspective, it has been inspired by an incredible story. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski relates the following incident which took place when he was the resident psychiatrist in a large state hospital. This hospital catered primarily to hundreds of mentally-challenged patients. At times, medical students came to see and study cases, which, although they may have been discussed in psychiatric literature, were to be found only in such a resident facility. He took the group to the chronic care building, where they housed the most difficult cases, ie, the patients who were hardest to reach. He introduced them to the unit's senior resident, a man who had spent the last 52 years in the hospital. He was presently 69 years old.

The patient, whom we will call "Sam," had not spoken a word in 52 years. Other than his daily routine, which consisted of a weird practice, he seemed docile and harmless. Every day, following breakfast, he would walk to a corner of the community room and assume a strange position on the floor, his body erect and his hands directed upward. It almost looked as if he were holding up something invisible. He remained in this position until lunch, after which he would return until dinner and thereafter until bedtime. This had gone on every day for the last 52 years. No therapy, medication or innovative electric shock treatment had succeeded in altering his behavior. No amount of convincing could get him to sit down on a chair in a normal manner – except for meals.

During the visit, one of the medical students asked for permission to speak to the patient. Although he wondered what impact the student's conversation could have on the patient, if decades of variegated psychiatric treatment had proven fruitless, nonetheless, Rabbi Twerski said, "Certainly, go for it."

The student went over to the patient, smiled, and said, "Why don't you sit down for a bit? I will take over." The man looked at the student with his blank look – no words, no smile, no recognition. The student then assumed the same contorted position of the patient, perfectly paralleling his posture, and repeated, "Why not sit down now? I will take over for you." Without a word, for the first time in fifty-two years, the patient left his position and sat down in a chair!

What happened? First and foremost, there is no rationale to explain the behavior of one who is mentally challenged. We do not know for certain what is going on in his mind. Rabbi Twerski concluded, however, that, quite possibly, this man believed that the world was going to fall and he alone was able to support it. Clearly, when one carries such an awesome responsibility on his shoulders, no entreaty will move him to let go – until someone else relieves him. The fact that he took meal breaks and sleeping time off – well, I said there is no rhyme or reason to the actions of such a person.

For fifty-two years, this man was dismissed as insane. No one ever bothered getting into his mind, attempting to reach out and give him some consideration. He was labeled as strange and left to rot for half a century. It took the compassion and sensitivity of the medical student to make the attempt to get into the patient's mind in order to try to understand what made him tick – differently. Furthermore, finally, a connection was established between a mind that had wavered off, that was no longer cogent, and one what was rational. Sadly, it was five decades too late.

Let us take this one step further. There is a gap between *frum*, observant, and non-observant. Gaps exist within the observant camp with some who seek to modernize, revolutionize the hallowed traditions and *halachos* to which we have adhered throughout the millennia. A gap exists between young and old, "off the *derech*" teens and mainstream *yeshivische*, *chassidish*, young people. While in no way shall we shift one iota from our beliefs, we might attempt to use compassion and common sense to peer into their minds, understand the pathologies, environment, and backgrounds from which they hail, or where they have regrettably made their home, in order to see that our differences are not necessarily ideological in nature, but rather, the result of insecurity, lack of self-esteem for various reasons, abuse and simply a lack of education.

Chesed begins at home. If we were to delve into the home and background of those with whom we differ, we might be surprised to discover that there is a "method to their madness."

וגם ללוט ההלך את אברם היה צאן ובקר ואדלמים

Also Lot who went with Avram had Flocks, cattle and tents. (13:5)

The Torah relates that Lot, who was traveling with Avraham *Avinu*, was very wealthy. Since the Torah wastes no words, informing us of Lot's wealth hardly seems significant. Why does the Torah mention it, and what are we to learn from it? *Rashi* explains that Lot's affluence was caused by his traveling with Avraham. How did *Rashi* understand that this is implied by the *pasuk*?

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, explains that every physical entity is a manifestation of a spiritual source. If Lot were wealthy, it could be traced back to its spiritual source. Lot's wealth was not created simply by chance or due to his astute business mind. His wealth was directly tied to his relationship with Avraham *Avinu*.

The following vignette echoes this concept. On one of his trips to the Diaspora, *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita*, was asked if it were really necessary to have so many able-bodied young men studying Torah full-time in *Kollel*. First, it places a "strain" on the "working" community who are asked to do their share in supporting Torah study. Second, probably throughout most of our history, there was not nearly such a high percentage of young men devoting themselves to full-time Torah study. *Rav Shteinman* replied that actually the question should be asked in the opposite way. Why do we need such a high percentage of wealthy Jews today, when, in fact, throughout our history, most of the Jewish People have been poor?

Rav Shteinman explained that the reason such affluence exists among the Jewish People is specifically because there are so many *bonei Torah* studying in *Kollel*. They require support in order to learn. Thus, Hashem has spread the wealth to a greater percentage of Jews – for this purpose. If there were to be fewer men learning Torah full-time – there would be no need for such wealth. Spiritual bounty generates financial prosperity. Lot was blessed with material bounty because he traveled with Avraham. It is not as if Avraham lacked material assets. He was doing quite well. Lot, however, was blessed, so that he could share. We should not make the mistake of thinking that Hashem blesses us so that we can build mansions and live in opulence. The money we have is for the specific purpose of sharing.

ויבא הפליט ויגד לאברם העברי

Then there came the fugitive and told Avram, the Ivri. (14:13)

Avram *halvri*, the conjunctive name, Avram the *Ivri*, is found only once in the Torah. It defines our Patriarch as being on one side, the other side, alone against the world. An individual whose moral, spiritual and ethical compass stood in stark contrast to that of the entire world – and continues to do so until this very day. Some people need to be popular, to receive public accolades, to be surrounded by the crowds, to be accepted by everyone. We understand that public appeal and acclaim can be dangerous snares that might devour a weak person. They are willing to compromise under the guise of flexibility, bend and even pervert their principles in order to be accepted by those whose endorsement we should revile.

Avram *halvri* – "The entire world was (is) on one side; and he is on the other side" (*Midrash Rabbah Bereishis* 42:8). Two points can be gleaned from this statement: the world is against Avraham; Avraham is against the world. *Horav Moshe Neriyah, zl*, explains that Nimrod's world, the world of hedonism and idol worship, was against Avraham. Also, the world of the King of Sodom, a world of Draconian justice, oppressive treatment of the weak and deprived, had Avraham in their crosshairs. He took on this harsh, cruel world which subjected innocent people to the most brutal punishment, just because they acted compassionately to strangers. Avraham fought them with kindness, teaching the world that cruelty was the antithesis of G-d's Divine Plan. Nimrod and Sodom – neither one cared for Avraham – both wanted him out of the picture. Thus, he was alone, isolated from the world. His world revolved around Hashem. Their world was its antithesis. His

descendants have learned (or should have learned) that we have no place within the world community. *Am levadad yishkon*, “A nation that will dwell in solitude” (*Bamidbar* 23:9). This is the only way. Unfortunately, not everyone can handle such a lifestyle. They require acceptance. Thus, they first acculturate and then assimilate, and they eventually outdo the Nimrods and Sodomites. When we breach the fence that should separate us, we demonstrate our insecurity and lack of pride, and then, ultimately, we become one with them.

In *Nifleosecha Asicha*, *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, quotes a meaningful analogy from a *Maggid*. The justice system in most civilized countries, such as the United States, is based on the skills (or lack thereof) of two lawyers: the prosecutor and defense attorney. Justice is not based upon proof, testimony, reality, but rather, on rhetoric, acting, sleight of mouth, illusion and delusion. In other words, truth does not always prevail. It is mostly a game of skill between two attorneys.

One time, an infamous criminal whose record spanned years, was finally apprehended and brought to trial. The prosecutor presented a brilliant case, citing each and every crime, describing it slowly, vividly, depicting the cruelty and greed of the criminal. He did a masterful job of presenting an airtight case for the prosecution. The criminal was going away for a few “centuries.”

The defense attorney was brilliant. He arose from his seat next to the defendant and faced the jury: “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, my words on behalf of the defendant are superfluous, because, in five minutes, the real perpetrator of these crimes will enter this hallowed room.” He pointed to the two large entrance doors and said, “In five minutes, those doors will open up and in will come the guilty one!”

The drama in the courtroom was incredible. The anticipation and excitement were palpable. Five minutes elapsed, and then five more minutes – yet no one walked through the doors. After half an hour, the defense attorney spoke again. “I have been watching each and every one of you. During this past half-hour, when you were all supposedly so certain that my client had perpetrated all of these crimes, you still could not avert your eyes from those doors. Why? Because you were not really sure that the real criminal would not walk in! If you were so certain of my client’s guilt, why did you look at the door? Aha! You are not certain. Then you must acquit my client!”

The entire courtroom was in a state of shock and pandemonium. Finally, the room quieted down, and the prosecutor rose to address the court: “While all of you turned in your seats to glance at the doors, I kept my eyes glued on one person: the defendant. During this entire drama presented by the attorney for the defense, not once did the defendant turn toward the doors. Do you want to know why? It is because he knew quite well that no one was walking through the doors, because the guilty party was sitting right here.” He pointed to the defendant and sat down.

Great story. Now for the lesson. First and foremost, we must thank Hashem for distinguishing us from the rest of the world. Our laws, based upon our Torah, separate us from the lost, misguided and confused people who search for a life of meaning and principle. We are so secure in our beliefs; we know for sure that our Torah is true and immutable, that we are like the defendant who never bothered looking up at the doors, because he knew the truth: no one was coming through the doors, because he was the criminal! Avraham *Halvri* stood alone against an entire world of confusion. They stared at the doors because they were misled by the guile and rhetoric of their convincing priests. We did not bother to look up, because we not only knew the truth – we were living it. I think it was *Horav Chaim Soloveitzick, zl*, who put *emunah*, faith, in Hashem in its proper perspective, when he said, “For the believer, there are no questions; for the non-believer, there are no answers.” How true.

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Torah.org
Weekly Halacha Parshas Lech Lecha
Davening Issues

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: What should one do if, mistakenly, he recited v’sein tal umatar livrachah after Succos but before the evening of December fifth?

Discussion: Although in Eretz Yisroel they have been reciting v’sein tal umatar livrachah since the evening of the seventh of Cheshvan, outside of Eretz Yisroel we do not ask for rain until the Maariv prayer of the fifth of December. This is because Eretz Yisrael, which is more elevated than other lands and does not have enough natural bodies of water to irrigate the land, requires much more rain than other countries{1}. If, however, one mistakenly recited v’sein tal umatar outside of Eretz Yisroel after Succos but before the evening of the fifth of December, he need not repeat his Shemoneh Esrei{2}. It is true that had he made this very mistake during the summer months and recited v’sein tal umatar—he would be required to repeat Shemoneh Esrei, but making that mistake anytime after Succos up until the fifth of December does not necessitate a repetition of Shemoneh Esrei. This is because we consider it premature to pray for rain before December fifth, but still, the period between Succos and December fifth is considered part of the “rainy season,” unlike the summer months, when rain is not welcome at all.

Question: Why do some people say morid ha-gashem with a kamatz under the gimmel, while others pronounce it with a segol under the gimmel—ha-geshem?

Discussion: The Hebrew word for rain is “geshem,” with a segol under the gimmel (and under the shin). Like many other words of comparable structure—two syllables, both vocalized with a segol (e.g., *eretz*, *kesef*, *eved*, etc.), the first segol is changed to a kamatz when the word appears at the end of a Biblical phrase{3} or sentence.

The correct pronunciation of the word ha-geshem or ha-gashem, therefore, depends on its location within the second blessing of Shemoneh Esreh. If the sentence—which begins with the words *atah gibor*—ends with the words *mashiv ha-ruach u’ morid ha-g_shem*, then ha-gashem is correct. If, however, the phrase is part of a longer sentence which ends with the words *be’rachamim rabim*, then the correct pronunciation is ha-geshem.

In all of the old siddurim which were published hundreds of years ago, the word is written as ha-geshem with a segol. While more recently many publishers changed the vocalization and printed ha-gashem instead{4} —and some poskim maintain that ha-gashem is the correct pronunciation{5} —most poskim{6} hold that the correct way to pronounce the word is ha-geshem, and this is how most contemporary siddurim print that word.

Question: What should one do if he wishes to daven on behalf of a sick person, but he does not know the name of the sick person’s mother{7}?

Discussion: The father’s name should be used instead{8}. If the father’s name is also unknown to him, then the family surname should be mentioned{9}.

A mother davening on behalf of her child should not mention her own name. Instead, she should say only “my son/daughter” followed by the child’s name{10}.

Question: Does one fulfill his obligation of reciting Kerias Shema if he fails to pronounce each word correctly according to the rules of dikduk (Hebrew grammar)?

Discussion: Chazal attach great significance to pronouncing the words of Kerias Shema correctly, going as far as to say that “one who is particular about reading Shema correctly will be rewarded with a ‘cooled down’ Geheinom{11}.” Still, Shulchan Aruch rules that b’diavad one fulfills his obligation of Shema even if he was not particular to pronounce each word correctly (e.g., he did not correctly accent each syllable), as long as he clearly articulated every single word and every single letter.

In particular, Chazal were concerned about words whose last letter is the same as the first letter of the next word. In the words bechall levavecha, for example, the letter lamed is both at the end of bechall and at the beginning of levavecha. Both lameds need to be clearly and distinctly pronounced, necessitating a slight pause between the two words; otherwise, the two words will sound like one long word—bechallevavecha. The same holds true for al levavchem, va'avadetem meheirah, and many others{12}.

It is interesting, though, that while Chazal specifically single out bechall levavecha as one of the word combinations where a pause is necessary, this particular pause must be extremely brief; otherwise, one runs afoul of a different grammatical rule: These two words are connected with a makaf, a hyphen, which means that they are supposed to be read together with no pause between them. Is this not a contradiction? On the one hand, a pause is necessary to separate the two lameds, while on the other hand, the two words are supposed to be read together{13}.

The solution is not to pause fully and leave a space between these two words (like we would between similar combinations, e.g., va'avadetem meheirah), but rather to leave a hair's-breadth between them—enunciating both lameds clearly and accenting the second word, levavecha{14}. One would be well advised to practice reading these words in advance, so that when he recites Kerias Shema the correct pronunciation will come easily{15}.

1. See Taanis 10a, Sefurno, Devarim 11:11 and Magen Avraham 117:1. 2. This issue is widely debated among the poskim: some require repeating the Shemoneh Esrei while most do not. Although Mishnah Berurah 117:13 and Be'ur Halachah, s.v. hatzrichim, recommends that one repeat the Shemoneh Esrei as a tefillas nedavah (a conditional, voluntary prayer), this recommendation should be followed only by those who are sure that they can concentrate properly for another Shemoneh Esrei. Since most people cannot, it is better for them to rely on the majority of poskim who do not require the repetition of Shemoneh Esrei at all in this case. 3. Most often the end of a phrase is indicated by an esnachta or a zakef katan. 4. See Minhag Yisrael Torah 114:1, which explains that the original change was implemented by the maskilim. 5. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:40-15; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Peninei Tefillah, pg. 145). 6. Levushei Mordechai 4:213; Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky (Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 213); Rav Y. Kamenetsky (Emes l'Yaakov al ha-Torah, Bereishis 3:19); Rav Y.Y. Weiss (quoted in Ishei Yisrael 23:25); Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:8-14); Az Nidberu 12:28; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:81. 7. There are several early sources that imply that the mother's name should be used when praying on behalf of an ill person; see Rashi, Shabbos 66b, s.v. bishma and Maharshah, ibid. See also Da'as Torah, O.C. 119:1, who quotes a Zohar in Parshas Shemos 146s that the father's name is not used since we are not always positive about the true identity of the father. Other reasons mentioned for this custom: 1) Based on the verse in Tehillim where King David prays for himself by saying: Ani avdecha ben amasecha (Teshuvos Zekan Aharon 1:11); 2) In order not to embarrass a person who has a non-Jewish father (Teshuvos Gevul Yehudah, O.C. 2). 8. See Aruch ha-Shulchan, O.C. 119:1, who says that even when the mother's name is known, the father's name may be used. See also Nitzotzei Aish, pg. 861, quoting Rav C. Kanievsky. 9. Orchos Rabbeinu 1:218, quoting Chazon Ish. 10. Rav C. Kanievsky (Ishei Yisrael 23, note 189). 11. See explanation of this concept in Mishnah Berurah 62:2. 12. O.C. 61:20. 13. In addition, if these two words are read separately without the makaf, then the proper vocalization is bechol with a cholom, and not bechall with a kamatz. 14. Mishnah Berurah 61:33.

15. A good start is to read and listen to Kuntress Shema B'ni, a guide to grammatically correct pronunciation of Kerias Shema, with an audio companion to the text (Rabbi S. Hershkowitz, Toronto, 2001). Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com
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Insights into Halacha Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

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**Ohr Somayach :: Insights Into Halacha
Mayim Acharonim, Chova?**

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

In Parshas Lech Lecha, we are introduced to an interesting personality named Bera, Melech S'dom, the King of S'dom. While he was certainly not

known for his morality and impeccable character, nonetheless, his title, as well as the destruction of his hometown using salt, described in Parshas Vayera[1], seemingly references a catalyst to a Mitzvah that many are wholly unfamiliar with: its homonym, 'Melach S'domis' or S'dom Salt. The Mitzva I am referring to is Mayim Acharonim, the handwashing before Birchas HaMazon[2].

Mitzva?!

I am sure that many readers are shaking their heads in disbelief, wondering how I can call this known chumra a Mitzva. This common, but slightly mistaken, belief was made evident to this author when a neighborhood housewife recently asked an interesting sheilah. Apparently, after hosting several friends and relatives for a Shabbos Seudah, she washed Mayim Acharonim along with the men, earning her much scorn and ridicule. The incredulous men commented that their washing Mayim Acharonim was only a chumra, and there obviously was no basis for a woman to do it as well. Our distraught domestic denizen wanted to know who acted correctly, and was astounded when I replied that technically speaking they both were.

A Bit of Background

Mayim Acharonim has an interesting background, as it actually has two entirely different sources and rationales mandating it. The first, in Gemara Brachos[3], discussing the source for ritual handwashing, explains that one can not make a bracha with dirty hands, and cites the pasuk in Parshas Kedoshim[4] "V'hiskadeeshtem, V'heyisem Kedoshim", "And you shall sanctify yourselves, and be holy". The Gemara clarifies that "And you shall sanctify yourselves" refers to washing the hands before the meal, Mayim Rishonim, and "and be holy" refers to washing the hands after the meal, Mayim Acharonim. In other words, by washing our hands before making a bracha (in this case before Bentsching), we are properly sanctifying ourselves. The second source, Gemara Chullin[5], on the other hand, refers to Mayim Acharonim as a "chova", an outright obligation. The Gemara elucidates that there is a certain type of salt in the world, called 'Melach S'domis', (actually one of the additions needed to make the Ketores properly[6]) that is so caustic that if it gets into a person's eyes, it can cause blindness r'l. Since one is supposed to have salt at his table at every meal[7], Chazal were worried that this specific type of salt may have found its way onto our tables and consequently could cause someone to become blind if he rubs his eyes after eating. Therefore, as a way to mitigate this salt's potentially devastating effects, they mandated handwashing after eating, known colloquially as Mayim Acharonim.

In fact, the Gemara's words are codified as halacha by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch[8], stating simply "Mayim Acharonim Chova". The Rambam as well writes that it is an obligation due to the potential Sakana involved[9]. As an aside, the Ben Ish Chai[10] posits that when eating, one should say this three word formula, and that way fulfill the halacha of speaking Divrei Torah at a meal[11].

Chova?

Well, if the Gemara, and even the Shulchan Aruch, consider washing Mayim Acharonim an actual obligation, then why do many treat it as a mere stringency? Furthermore, there are those (many of Germanic origin) who claim that their custom is to specifically not wash Mayim Acharonim! Additionally, if it is a binding halacha, why don't women generally observe this washing?

The answer lies in the commentary of the Ba'alei Tosafos to both aforementioned Gemaras[12]. Tosafos comments that 'nowadays, when 'Melach S'domis' is no longer found amongst us, we no longer are accustomed to washing Mayim Acharonim, and one may Bentsch without first washing his hands'. In other words, Tosafos maintains that although washing Mayim Acharonim used to be an obligation, since the problematic S'dom Salt was no longer prevalent already in their days, one is no longer required to wash Mayim Acharonim. In fact, not washing for Mayim Acharonim is cited as the common minhag by several Ashkenazic Rishonim, as well as the Levush and the Rema[13].

An additional rationale for leniency is put forward by the famed Rav Yaakov Emden[14]. He points out that ever since the advent of cutlery, most civilized people (hopefully) do not do the bulk of their eating with their hands, rather with a fork and spoon. Therefore, he explains, one who eats with silverware (or even plasticware) and did not actually touch his food, has no need to wash Mayim Acharonim.

Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch[15] cites Tosafos' lenient view as well, at the end of the very same siman where he rules that "Mayim Acharonim Chova"! Several authorities explain his seemingly contradictory intent that indeed nowadays one is no longer mandated to wash Mayim Acharonim. Yet, the Shulchan Aruch is telling us that, nevertheless, we still should strive to do this important Mitzvah[16].

This view is cited by many halachic decisors including the Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Hashulchan, and Mishna Berura, who relate that although Mayim Acharonim may no longer be obligated by the strict letter of the law, nonetheless, one still should be very stringent with its adherence[17]. Other authorities cite Kabbalistic reasons to be strict with its observance[18]. The Vilna Gaon was known to be extremely makpid on this halacha, referring to it as both a "Chova" and a "Mitzva", even nowadays[19].

Wash This Way!

Interestingly, authorities debate the proper way to perform washing Mayim Acharonim. One machlokes involves how much water to use. The basic halacha is that this handwashing has no set limit or minimum; rather even a small amount of water is sufficient[20]. However, the Kabbalistic approach mandates using only a small amount of water[21]. Conversely, the Vilna Gaon was makpid to use a full Reviis of water, as he considered Mayim Acharonim a full washing, akin to the Netillas Yadayim required before eating bread (Mayim Rishonim)[22].

Another machlokes revolves around how much of the hand must be washed by Mayim Acharonim. Although the basic halacha only requires from the finger tips to the second knuckle[23], nevertheless, Kabbalistically speaking, one should wash the entire fingers[24]. A third opinion, that of the Vilna Gaon, is that the whole hand should be washed, as he considered Mayim Acharonim a full Netillas Yadayim[25]. The unifying thread of these disparate shittos is their mandating adherence to the strict performance of Mayim Acharonim.

Women's Role

Yet, so far, none of this explains why women commonly do not wash Mayim Acharonim. This "custom" seems to be an anomaly, as, technically, women and men share the same obligation in this Mitzvah, and we do not find a halachic codifier making such a distinction.

Several contemporary authorities, including Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner and Rav Moshe Sternbuch[26] offer a possible justification. They explain that although women and men were both equally obligated in this Mitzvah, nevertheless, since it is no longer mandated as a strict requirement due to the dearth of 'Melach S'domis', but rather as a proper "minhag", it is entirely possible that women collectively never accepted this stringency upon themselves. Therefore, nowadays they are not required to wash Mayim Acharonim[27]. Indeed, Rav Yonah Merzbach (pronounced Mertzbach; Founder and Rosh Yeshivas Kol Torah) was quoted as stating that the common minhag for women in Ashkenaz, even among 'Chareidim L'Dvar Hashem', was not to wash Mayim Acharonim[28].

However, many other contemporary halachic decisors, including Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, Rav Ovadia Yosef, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, the Rivevos Efraim, and the Shevet HaKehasi[29], all rule that regardless of the rationale, women still should be vigilant with washing Mayim Acharonim.

To Wash or Not to Wash?

Back to our dilemma. This background is why I informed that harried housewife that technically speaking both she and her relatives were correct. She undeniably had what to rely upon not to wash Mayim Acharonim. Yet,

she was definitely correct in making sure to do so anyway. As the Pele Yoetz explains, even if there no longer is a danger posed from salt that blinds our eyes, nevertheless, we still have an obligation to listen to the words of our Chachamim, and not blind ourselves to their wisdom[30].

Postscript: Although the Vilna Gaon is the machmir shitta in the three separate Mayim Acharonim related machlokasim cited above, there is one regarding Mayim Acharonim where he is quoted as being the lenient opinion: talking between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching. This issue of talking before Bentching is a large topic in its own right. The Gemara Brachos (42a) writes that one may not be mafsik (make a separation) between the washing and the Birchas Hamazon. There is a machlokes Rishonim how to understand the Gemara. Rashi (ad loc.), as well as the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 20) understand that this means that one may not eat [there is a whole separate machlokes Rishonim whether or not this includes drinking] and this is how the Tur and Shulchan Aruch cite the halacha as well (Orach Chaim 179, 1). According to the Kessef Mishna (on Rambam ad loc.) - this understanding excludes talking - meaning the only problematic hefsek is eating and / or drinking; ergo talking would be permitted.

Yet, the Rosh (in Brachos ad loc.) understands the Gemara's rule as meaning that once one performs Mayim Acharonim, it is as if he answered the zimun (i.e. akin to have started Bentching). If so, then talking would be proscribed as well. Other Rishonim seem to accept the Rosh as well.

What is interesting is that in his Beis Yosef commentary (Orach Chaim 179 s.v. yesh lidakdek), the Kessef Mishna retracted his opinion, ruling akin to the Rosh - that even speaking in between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching is prohibited.

On that, the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 181, 1) takes him to task for his retraction, and seemingly ruling like the Kessef Mishna that talking between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching is permitted. Yet, there is some confusion as to whether or not this was his actual maskana lemaaseh. In fact, that is how the Ba'er Heitiv (Orach Chaim 179, 1) cites the Magen Avraham - as ruling leniently; yet, the Mishna Berura (Shaar Hatziyun 179, 1) argues, maintaining that the Magen Avraham's conclusion was truly like the Beis Yosef, to be machmir - like the Rosh, and not like what he wrote in Kessef Mishna like the Rambam.

Most poskim in fact rule this way, that is therefore assur to talk between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching, including the Bach (Orach Chaim 181, 4), Elya Rabba (ad loc. 9), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 44, 1), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 15), Mishna Berura (179, 1 and 181, 24), and Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 179, 1 and 181, 20). In fact, the Mishna Berura implies (Shaar Hatziyun 179, 7) that talking might be considered a bigger problem than eating - as if one eats - we seem to follow the synthesis opinion of the Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 179, Eshel Avraham 1) that it cancelled out the first Mayim Acharonim - but we can simply wash again before Bentching; whereas since it is not so clear cut that talking is a hefsek, it is unclear whether one is allowed to wash again to Bentch - he might now not be allowed to Bentch! [Although it is important to note that this is not the normative halacha.] The Mishna Berura also seems to hold that talking after Mayim Acharonim is more strict than talking after Mayim Rishonim (for Hamotzie).

An additional factor is that the Arizal (Shaar Hamitzvos, Parshas Eikev) was machmir with this and drove the point home with an interesting tale about one who had unexplained shoulder pain. The Arizal instructed him not to talk between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching and the pain subsequently went away. He explained that "Netilla Teikef L'Bracha" (washing immediately prior to Bentching), is connected to Katef and therefore one should be stringent. The Chida (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 181, 3), quoting his ancestor, Rav Avraham Azulai, citing the Yeushalmi) avers that regarding one who is makpid on reciting Bentching immediately after Mayim Acharonim, the Satan will not have the ability to level accusations against him during that meal.

A middle-ground opinion is found in the Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 181, 6), who writes that a few necessary words are permitted, as 'Hefsek' is only referring to only Divrei Torah or a conversation. So where does the Gr" a fit in? In Biur HaGr" a (Orach Chaim 179, 2) he cites the whole background to the machlokes, citing the many Rishonim and the shakla v' tarya. Yet, he concludes simply that in Chullin (Ch. 6, 2 s.v. d'amar) the Rosh seems to have been chozer from his stringent position and concludes that "v'chein daas kol haposkim". In other words, the Vilna Gaon held that since there is a seeming contradiction in the Rosh, and all of the machmir opinions are based on his shitta, one need not be machmir with the no talking before Bentching rule. However, and although the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 1) seems to rule this way and declares that talking is not the hefsek that the Rishonim were debating, he nevertheless concludes (Orach Chaim 181, 9) that "lechatchilla aino kedai lehafsik" as "Teikif L'Netilla Bracha" and therefore "mikol makom aino kedai laasos kein", it is not worthwhile to do so. This article was written L'Iluy Nishmas R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba and l'Zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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[1] See Parshas Vayera (Bereishis Ch. 19, verses 24 & 25) and Parshas Nitzavim (Devarim Ch. 29, verse 22), which, as part of the tochacha Moshe Rabbeinu gives Bnei Yisrael warning them of the dire consequences of not listening to the word of Hashem, states "gafrik v'melach sereifah kol artzah...k'malpeichas S'dom", "Sulfur and salt will burn your whole land... just as (it did) in the turning over (destruction) of S'dom". According to the author of the Zera Gad on the Haggada, Rav Tzvi Hirsch of Horodna, in his glosses to Targum Rav Yosef on Divrei HaYamim (II, Ch. 13, 5; as cited by the Mareh Yehoshua on the Maaseh Rav - 84), who explains Dovid HaMelech's eternal 'Bris Melach' with Hashem as parallel to the salty seas never becoming sweet, this is the true source of Melach S'domis. Rav Tzvi Hirsch explains that the current Yam HaMelach (Dead Sea) sits upon the former site of S'dom and its sister cities. Since all of the seas and oceans are connected, the salty destruction of S'dom is what turned them all salty. Accordingly, 'Melach S'domis' is still extant, if highly diluted. He therefore maintains that washing Mayim Acharonim is still actually obligatory nowadays, akin to the opinion of the Vilna Gaon (see footnote 19). The wording of the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 5) implies that he concurs with this understanding as well.

[2] While Bera's personal connection to the Mitzva of Mayim Acharonim is tenuous at best, relying on homonyms and clever wordplay, on the other hand and quite interestingly, due to Avraham Avinu's famous "thread and shoelace" rebuttal to his "largesse", Bera unwittingly became the catalyst for the Mitzvos of Tzitzis and Tefillin. See Gemara Sota (17a) and Chullin (89a).

[3] Gemara Brachos (53b).

[4] Vayikra (Chapter 20, verse 7).

[5] Gemara Chullin (105a-b) and Gemara Eruvin (17b).

[6] See Gemara Krisus (6a) and Rambam (Hilchos Klei HaMikdash Ch. 2, 3).

[7] There is a Mitzvah to have salt on the table when having a meal, which is directly based on the requirement to have salt on every Korban (Vayikra Ch. 2, verse 13), as our tables are compared to the Mizbe'ach (Altar) and our food to a sacrifice. See Gemara Brachos (55a), Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. haba), Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 167, quoting the Shibolei Leket 141), Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 167, 5), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 15), Machatzis Hashekel (ad loc. 15), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 7; citing the Arizal), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 12), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 30), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 40). See also Shla" h (Shaar HaOsiyos, Eimek Bracha 66), Kiryas Chana Dovid (49), and Halachic World (vol. 2, pg. 151, "Table Salt"). L'maaseh, although nowadays our bread is considered 'nekiya' and would not have a requirement to dip it into salt me'ikar hadin, nevertheless, due to Chazal's comparison of our tables to the Mizbe'ach, one should still have salt on the table while eating. Additionally, Kabbalistically speaking, one should still dip their bread into salt three times. See also R' Zvi Ryzman's recent RaTzvi on Maagalei HaShana (vol. 1, 3, Ch. 2, 10) who adds a potential reason based on the Baal HaTurim (Vayikra Ch. 2, verse 13) regarding the three times that salt is mentioned in said pasuk. For more on this topic, see previous article titled "Salting With Sugar?".

[8] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181, 1), based on the opinions of many Rishonim, including the Rif (Chullin 37b), Sefer HaChinuch (Parshas Eikev, Mitzva 430 s.v. mayim), and Tur (Orach Chaim 181).

[9] Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 3). The Rambam implies that he holds that 'Melach S'domis' is still extant.

[10] Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 7), quoting his esteemed father and grandfather.

[11] See Pirkei Avos (Ch. 3, Mishna 3).

[12] Tosafos (Brachos 53b s.v. v'heyisem; Chullin 105a s.v. mayim; Erwin 17b s.v. Mayim Acharonim).

[13] Including the Rosh (Brachos Ch. 8, 6), the Ohr Zarua (vol. 1, 72), the Agur (235), the SMA" G (Positive Mitzva 27), the Levush (Orach Chaim 181, 9) and the Rema in his Darchei Moshe glosses on the Tur (ad loc. 2). See also Shu" t Hisorerus Teshuva (vol. 1, 63), who defends the "common custom" of not washing Mayim Acharonim.

[14] Mor U'Ketzia (end 181 s.v. daf). This is l'shitaso, as the Ya'avetz rules similarly by the handwashing requirements of a davar hateebulo b' mashkeh - as explained in a previous article titled see previous article titled 'The Coffee Dipping Conundrum'. However, the Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 27) cites several authorities who do not agree with the Ya'avetz's leniency and concludes that even if one ate exclusively with utensils, he must still wash Mayim Acharonim. Similarly, regarding a different halacha related to handwashing, we find that although according to the letter of the law it need not be required, nevertheless, many authorities rule that one should still wash his hands, as hand washing does not usually entail too much effort - see previous article titled 'The Halachic Power of a Diyuk'.

[15] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181, 10).

[16] Shu" t Nechpeh B'Kessef (vol. 1, pg. 154, 4th column), Yalkut Yosef (vol. 8, 181, footnotes 1 and 2), Halichos Olam (Parshas Shelach, 1), Halacha Berura (vol. 8, Orach Chaim 181, Birur Halacha 1 s.v. v'hinei).

[17] Chayei Adam (46, 1), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 181, 9), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44, 1), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 5), Mishna Berura (181, 22). Other poskim who rule this way include the Rashal (Yam Shel Shlomo, Chullin Ch. 8, 10), Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 181, 10), Elyah Rabbah (Orach Chaim 181, 9), Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 181, Mishbetzos Zahav 1, citing several reasons for stringency), Maharsham (Daas Torah, Orach Chaim 181, 10; quoting the Toras Chaim), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 6), Shoneh Halachos (vol. 1, 181, 1), Shu" t Ohr L'Tzion (vol. 2, pg. 303), Yalkut Yosef (ibid.) and Halacha Berura (ibid.). Many of these authorities suspect that even though actual 'Melach S'domis' might no longer be prevalent, still other types of common salt that would be harmful if rubbed into eyes nonetheless are. [This chashash was first mentioned by Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah (Brachos 40b in the dapei HaRif) in the name of the Rambam (ibid.), 'shema yesh bo Melach S'domis oh melach sheveva k'Melach S'domis'.] Additionally, even if salt was no longer an issue, still, one fulfills the Mitzvah of "V'heyisem Kedoshim" by washing Mayim Acharonim.

[18] The Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 181, 1) states that the words of Chazal are really "Sod" wrapped in "Peshat". Therefore even if the "Peshat" is no longer relevant, the hidden meanings still are. He then cites that the Zohar (Parshas Terumah pg. 154b and Parshas Pinchas pg. 246a) and the Arizal (Shaar Hamitzvos, Parshas Eikev) write that one should be extremely vigilant with Mayim Acharonim due to Kabbalistic reasons. This zehirus with Mayim Acharonim based on Kabbalistic reasons is also cited by the Shlah (Shaar HaOsiyos, Os Kuf s.v. u'ksheim), the Magen Avraham (ibid.), the Chida (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 181, 7), the Pele Yo'etz (Os Nun, Netillas Yadayim s.v. v'yeish), Shulchan HaTahor (181, 1 and footnote, who calls it a 'chova gamur'), Rav Chaim Fala'ji (Kaf Hachaim 25, 2, 8 & 9, quoting the Yalkut Ruveini on Vayikra), the Matteh Moshe (vol. 2, 306), Ben Ish Chai (ibid.), and in Shu" t Min Hashamayim (57). See mv" r Rav Yosef Yitzchok Lerner's classic Shemiras HaGuf VeHanefesh (vol. 1, Ch. 56) at length.

[19] See Biur HaGr" a (Orach Chaim 181, 12) who was extremely stringent with this halacha, as he rejects the common leniencies offered by Tosafos and the Rosh. Additionally, Maaseh Rav (84) and Piskei HaGr" a (Orach Chaim 181, 10) mutually in the Gr" a's name, refer to Mayim Acharonim as both a "Chova" and a "Mitzva", even nowadays. This is also how it is cited in Kesser Rosh (82, 1), as how the Gr" a's prime talmid, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, held as well. See also Mishna Berura (Orach Chaim 181, 22) who explains that according to the Gr" a the sakana of 'Melach S'domis' still applies nowadays. This also seems to be the Rambam's understanding (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 3), and is cited by the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 5) as well, that those who use sea salt should still be wary of 'Melach S'domis', which would fit in with the explanation of the Zera Gad (see footnote 1).

[20] The Kol Bo (23), quoting the Raavad, as well as the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 181 s.v. mashma) citing the opinion of Rabbeinu Bachya (Shulchan Shel Arba, Shaar 1 s.v. v'yesh hefresh), ruled that there is no shiur for the amount of water needed for Mayim Acharonim, and even a small amount will do. The Elyah Rabbah (ad loc. 3) and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 8) wrote that this is indeed the halacha. This seems to be the common custom - see Mishna Berura (ad loc. 19). Similarly, several contemporary authorities, including the Chazon Ish (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1, 70), Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin (Shu" t Gevuros Elyahu vol. 1, 53, 4), and Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner (Kovetz M'Bais Levi vol. 17, pg. 22, 3) wrote that the prevalent minhag is that one only needs to use a small amount of water.

[21] See Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 8), Kaf Hachaim (Falaj'i; 25, 2), and Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 181, 6). See next footnote.

[22] Maaseh Rav (84), cited by the Mishna Berura (Orach Chaim 181, 19). This is also how it is cited in Kesser Rosh (82, 1), as how the Gr" a's prime talmid, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, held as well. The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 8) notes that many Gedolim washed with a full Reviis, and he personally does not see any reason to be makpid on only using a small amount of water. However, the Chazon Ish is quoted (Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1, 70; citing the Steipler Gaon; and in the new print of Maaseh Rav, Weinreb edition; Miluim pg. 320, s.v. u'l'inyan; quoting Rav Chaim Kanievsky) as not believing that the Gr" a was actually makpid on a shiur Reviis for Mayim Acharonim. However, see Shu" t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173 s.v. v'achshav) who writes that this shemua is tzarich iyun gadol, as why should this rule in Maaseh Rav be any less reliable as to the Gr" a's personal hanhaga than any other one in the sefer, especially as his talmidim were known to be stringent for washing this way. He attempts to answer that perhaps the Chazon Ish was referring to washing only to the second knuckle (as opposed to the whole hand) with a Reviis, that he did not believe was the Gr" a's true shitta. However, he reiterates, washing the whole hand with a Reviis (meaning a full Netillas Yadayim) was indeed the Gr" a's opinion.

[23] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181, 4), quoting the Tur (ad loc.) and Rashba (Toras HaBayis, Bayis 6, Shaar 1, Ch. 9), Levush (ad loc.), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eishel Avraham 4), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 46, 1), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44, 1), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 7). Indeed, in his Beis Yosef commentary (ad loc. 4), the Shulchan Aruch

explicitly rules against Rabbeinu Bachya's opinion (Shulchan Shel Arba pg. 466) of mandating whole finger washing. Several contemporary authorities, including Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Shu"t Gevuros Eliyahu vol. 1, 53, 4), and Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner (Kovetz M'Bais Levi vol. 17, pg 22, 3) wrote that the prevalent minhag is that one only needs to wash until the second knuckle. The Mishna Berura (ibid. end 10) writes that he sees people who are scrupulous with washing Mayim Acharonim, yet only wash the tips of their fingers, not realizing that they must wash until the second knuckle to fulfill the Mitzva. He calls this minute washing a 'Maaseh Ra', and exhorts everyone to wash at least until the second knuckle.

[24] The Arizal (Shaar HaKavamos pg. 72b) and the Siddur HaRashash maintain that Kabbalistically, the entire fingers must be washed during Mayim Acharonim. The Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 181, 17) rules this way as well. [In Orach Chaim 157, 22 the Kaf Hachaim explains the Arizal's reasoning for this.] He adds a rule, that anytime a halacha is not specifically mentioned in the Gemara, but its practical application is debated by Poskim, we should follow the practice of the Kabbalists. He adds that certainly, if the Shulchan Aruch would have seen the ruling of the Arizal, he would have mandated whole finger washing as well. As mentioned in a previous footnote, requiring the whole fingers to be washed was also the opinion of Rabbeinu Bachya (Shulchan Shel Arba pg. 466). The Mishna Berura (181, 4, Biur Halacha s.v. ad) concludes that lechatchilla one should try to be machmir for this opinion. [Interestingly, he refers to it as the Gr"a's shitta. On this, see Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173) who explains that the Gr"a's true shitta was washing the full hand. See next footnote.]

[25] See Biur HaGr"a (Orach Chaim 181, 12, s.v. yesh), Chidushei HaGr"a Imrei Noam (on Brachos 15a and 53b), Maaseh Rav (84), and in many glosses on the Maaseh Rav, including Damesek Eliezer, Ohr Chodosh, and Biurei Rav Nafali Hertz HaLevi. This was also attested to by the Gr"a's talmid, Rav Zundel Salant (HaTzaddik Ri"Z M'Salant pg. 115), and was the personal hanhaga of the Brisker Rav [see Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173) at length on the Gr"a's shitta of Mayim Acharonim].

[26] Shu"t Shevet HaLevi (vol. 3, 23, 3 s.v. l'inyan) and Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 174). However, Rav Sternbuch concludes that nevertheless women still should wash Mayim Acharonim. He notes that certainly according to the Gr"a and others who maintain that even nowadays that Mayim Acharonim is obligatory, there would be no difference between men and women in this aspect. He adds that he has seen many 'Chassidim and Anshei Maaseh' whose wives were careful to wash Mayim Acharonim. He concludes that while women should do so, it is preferable that they should wash unobtrusively to not fall into the category of 'giving an impression of showing off' (mechezi k'yuhara).

[27] There are several other possible justifications for women's general lackadaisicalness with Mayim Acharonim: The Ya'avetz (Mor U'Ketziach ibid.) posits that since women are generally more rigorous regarding hygiene and cleanliness they certainly would make sure not to eat with their hands, and l'shitaso not be required in Mayim Acharonim [however, he concludes that barring that, women and men have equal obligation in this Mitzvah]. Others [see Shu"t VaYevarech Dovid (vol. 1, Orach Chaim 30) and Yalkut Yosef (ibid.)] opine that since men are only makpid due to Kabbalistic reasons and not because of actual halachic concerns, women are not beholden to keep it.

[28] Cited in Halichos Bas Yisrael (pg. 58, end of footnote 11).

[29] Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld (Shu"t Salmas Chaim, new print, Orach Chaim 174), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Halichos Bas Yisrael Ch. 3, footnote 11), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Ha'aros B'Maseches Chullin 105b), Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg (cited in the Artscroll Ohel Sarah Siddur, endnote 105), Rav Ovadia Yosef (Halichos Olam vol. 2, Parshas Shlach 1), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Darchei Halacha glosses to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 44, 1), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 1, 174), the Rivevos Efraim (Shu"t vol. 1, 140, 3), and the Shevet HaKehasi (Shu"t vol. 1, 94). Others contemporary sefarim who rule that women should wash Mayim Acharonim include Halichos Baysa (Ch. 12, 2), Yalkut Yosef (ibid. and his Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 181, 2), and Halacha Berura (ibid.). In fact, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, end 5) already mentioned that one should make sure that 'kol bnei baivo' wash Mayim Acharonim.

[30] Pele Yo'etz (Os Num, Netillas Yadayim s.v. v'yeish). There are several additional reasons to be vigilant with Mayim Acharonim. In Shu"t Min HaShamayim (ibid; cited by the Aruch Hashulchan ibid.) he explains that 'kol hameikil b'Mayim Acharonim mekilim lo mezonosav min HaShmayim'. Additionally, the Chida (Birkei Yosef idid.) cites that his saintly grandfather was told in a She'elas Chalom that 'hameikil b'Mayim Acharonim mekilin lo yamav u'shnosav'. Definitely excellent reasons to observe this washing. For more on the topic of She'elos Chalomos in general, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's Lekutei Eliezer (ppg. 59 - 63).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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May I pass up this mitzvah?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Inexperienced Father

Abba Chodosh asks me the following question: "Before we relocated for a particular job, I had trained as a mohel. Since our children born since that time were daughters, I never ended up performing a bris without the supervision of an experienced mohel. Now that my son was born, am I required to perform the bris myself?"

Question #2 Successful Mezuzos

Baal Eisektov asks: "Thank G-d, we are inaugurating a new branch of our business. Common practice is to give a rav the honor of installing the mezuzos. But shouldn't I be doing that myself, because of the principle of mitzvah bo yoseir mibishlucho?"

Question #3 Sharing the Challah

Leah asks me: "Recently, I participated in a tour of a large bakery, and the mashgiach offered me to take challah there, which I did. Someone afterwards told me that the mashgiach should not have been so free in giving away his mitzvah. Did he, indeed, do something wrong?"

Answer: May I delegate?

One of the most basic rules of business and life management is to learn how to entrust responsibility and tasks to others. Does this concept extend to the observance of mitzvos? If I have a mitzvah to carry out, am I permitted to assign it to someone else?

All of the questions asked above are contingent on the same basic underlying issue:

Under what circumstances may I hand over the performance of a mitzvah that I could do myself?

The basics

The Gemara rules that one fulfills a mitzvah when it is performed by an agent, although it is preferable to do it himself (Kiddushin 41a). This is called mitzvah bo yoseir mibishlucho, it is better to perform a mitzvah yourself, rather than have someone else do it for you. This rule is not needed in cases of mitzvah shebegufo, where the mitzvah is incumbent on a person to do with and upon his own body, and a sheliach cannot be made at all. An example of the latter case is the wearing of tefillin: I cannot make someone an agent for me by asking that he don tefillin in my stead, because the mitzvah is that the tefillin be placed on my arm and my head.

Anything done wrong?

Our first consideration is: Granted that, under normal circumstances, a person should perform the mitzvah himself, has he violated anything by requesting that an agent do it for him? The Gemara implies that a person (a meshalei'ach) delegating someone else to perform a mitzvah for him has done nothing wrong; he has, however, forfeited an opportunity to perform a mitzvah.

However, other factors may have an impact on the final ruling. Let us consider, for a moment, the situation above, where the father has been trained as a mohel, but is lacking extensive experience. What if his wife, the baby's mother, prefers that he not perform the bris, and that they opt to use an experienced mohel instead? Does Abba's shalom bayis become a factor in whether or not he should perform the bris? If he is not violating anything by appointing an agent, then I would personally rule that his wife's serenity is the most important factor. However, this may not be true if it is prohibited to assign the mitzvah to someone else.

Are there circumstances in which it is fine to have the agent perform a mitzvah for me?

What are the halachic principles upon which I can base my decision?

Kisuy hadam practices

Much of the halachic literature discussing these questions originates with the mitzvah of kisuy hadam. The Gemara teaches that the mitzvah of kisuy hadam, the Torah's requirement that one cover the blood with earth after shechting poultry or chayos, such as deer and antelope is incumbent upon the shocheit. According to the rule of mitzvah bo yoseir mibishlucho, the shocheit should cover the blood himself. Yet, it was, and is, common practice that shochatim honor someone else with fulfilling the mitzvah. Is this permitted? Let us see if we can find Talmudic precedents for the practice.

Kohen application

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 110a) teaches that an elderly or ill kohen for whom it is difficult to offer a korban himself may bring his korban to the Beis Hamikdash and ask a different kohen to offer it in his stead. Notwithstanding that it is a mitzvah of the elderly kohen, he may delegate the performance of the mitzvah, since it is difficult for him. Thus, we see that, at least under certain circumstances, one does not violate halachah by asking someone else to perform a mitzvah in one's place. The Tevuos Shor (28:14) notes that we see from this Talmudic passage that there are situations in which a person is able to perform a mitzvah himself, yet he has the option of passing the opportunity to someone else.

Yibum application

Here is another Talmudic precedent that permits someone required to observe a mitzvah to defer it to someone else. One of the Torah's mitzvos, yibum, is that a man should marry his late brother's widow, if his brother left no descendants. The Mishnah teaches that the mitzvah devolves specifically upon the oldest surviving brother. If he chooses not to fulfill the mitzvah, then and only then does the mitzvah pass to his younger brother.

The Gemara (Yevamos 44a) discusses a situation in which there are at least seven brothers in a family, of whom five are married without any children. The five married brothers all die, thereby creating five mitzvos of yibum for the oldest brother to perform. The Gemara's conclusion is that if the oldest brother wants to marry as many as four of the widows, he may, clearly noting that he is not required to do so, even

should he have the financial and physical ability to provide the needs of all four widows. The Gemara advises against his marrying more than four, out of concern that he will not be able to provide his new wives with sufficient attention. (We can definitely conclude that marital expectations have changed since the time of the Gemara.)

The Tevuos Shor (28:14) notes that we see from this Talmudic passage that there are situations in which a person could perform a mitzvah himself, yet he has the option of passing the opportunity to someone else. Based on this and other Talmudic sources, the Tevuos Shor justifies the practice of shochatim honoring someone else with the mitzvah of kisuy hadam.

This ruling of the Tevuos Shor can be used to explain the practice that forms the basis of Mr. Eisektov's question. Why is there a common practice of honoring a respected rav with installing mezuzos at a new business? The answer is that, since the owners are doing it to honor the rav, they view this consideration as a greater mitzvah than performing the mitzvah themselves.

However, other authorities disagree with the Tevuos Shor's approach, contending that providing someone else with honor is not sufficient reason to justify not fulfilling the mitzvah oneself (Binas Adam #7). Still others are of the opinion that the opposite of the Tevuos Shor's approach is true: they posit that asking someone to act as one's agent is permitted, since one still fulfills the mitzvah, whereas honoring someone with the mitzvah without making him an agent is forbidden (Peleisi 28:3).

Sandek application

Here is another situation in which we see how a respected early authority ruled. "The father of a newborn boy who does not want to be the sandek himself, because he desires to have harmonious family relationships and demonstrate his respect, should give the honor to his own father, the baby's paternal grandfather. However, if the baby's paternal grandfather prefers that his own father (the baby's great-grandfather) be honored, then he may give the honor to the great-grandfather, and this is the prevalent custom." (Leket Yosher) The time-honored role of the sandek, the one who holds the baby during a bris, is, in itself, a mitzvah. By holding the baby, the sandek assists the mohel doing the mitzvah. Since the mitzvah of bris milah is the father's, logic suggests that a father who is not a mohel should be the sandek. However, since he does not want anyone to be upset and also wants to fulfill his own mitzvah of respecting his parents, common practice is that the father honors someone else with being sandek.

Those who permit honoring someone else with the mitzvah of kisuy hadam would no doubt rally support to their approach from the ruling of the Leket Yosher. Those who feel that the shocheit should not honor someone else with the mitzvah of kisuy hadam will presumably contend that the sandek is not actually fulfilling a mitzvah that is required of him, and that is why its performance can be transferred to someone else. On the other hand, since kisuy hadam is incumbent on the shocheit, they would contend that he may not honor someone else with this mitzvah.

Passing on a bris

At this point, I would like to discuss how these rules affect the laws of bris milah, which was the first question I mentioned above (and the reason why I chose to discuss the topic the week of Parshas Lech Lecha). The Or Zarua, a rishon, writes that it is forbidden for a father who is a qualified mohel to have someone else perform his son's bris milah (Hilchos Milah #107). (The Or Zarua, a native of what is today the Czech Republic, traveled to attend the yeshivos of the Baalei Tosafos in Northern France. He subsequently became the rav of Vienna, where he apparently opened a yeshivah. The Maharam of Rothenberg was one of the Or Zarua's disciples.) According to the obvious reading of the Or Zarua, we already have enough information to answer Abba Chodosh's question above: Abba had once trained to be a mohel, but never practiced. Now that he has his first son, is he required to perform the bris himself, or may he have a more experienced mohel do it? Assuming that Abba can still perform a bris safely, the Or Zarua would seem to rule that he is required to be the mohel.

However, this answer is not obvious. Firstly, the Rema (Darkei Moshe, Yoreh Deah 264:1) wonders why the Or Zarua rules that it is prohibited for the mohel to have an agent perform the mitzvah for him. We fully understand that it is not preferred – the Gemara says that it is better to perform a mitzvah oneself, rather than have it performed by someone else. However, the Or Zarua does not say simply that it is preferred that the father perform the mitzvah himself – the Or Zarua prohibits having someone else perform the mitzvah!

In his comments on the Shulchan Aruch, the Rema omits mention of the Or Zarua's ruling, a factor noted by some authorities as proof that the Rema rejected the position of the Or Zarua (Tevuos Shor 28:14). However, the Shach (Choshen Mishpat 382:4) independently reaches the same conclusion as the Or Zarua, based on his analysis of a statement of the Rosh. The Shach's comments require an introduction.

A mitzvah snatcher

The Gemara rules that someone who performs a mitzvah that another person is required to do and is planning to perform is charged a fine of ten gold coins for stealing someone else's mitzvah (Bava Kamma 91b; Chullin 87a). One of the Gemara's cases is as follows: A shocheit slaughtered a bird, and then, before he had a chance to fulfill the

mitzvah of covering the blood, someone else covered it, thus snatching the mitzvah. The shocheit brought the offending party to a din Torah before Rabban Gamliel, who fined the mitzvah snatcher ten gold coins. Rashi (Chullin 87a s.v. Litein) explains that the fine is for depriving someone of the reward he should have received for the mitzvah.

When citing this Gemara, the Rosh (Chullin 6:8) recounts the following story: The father of a newborn asked a mohel to perform the bris, but a different mohel performed it without getting permission. Subsequently, the first mohel sued the second mohel in Rabbeinu Tam's beis din for stealing the mitzvah. Rabbeinu Tam ruled that, although the interloping mohel's act was despicable, for a variety of technical reasons not germane to our topic, there are no grounds to fine the mohel for stealing the bris. The Rosh agrees with the ruling, but for a reason that Rabbeinu Tam did not mention: Although the father told the mohel to perform the bris, the mohel does not thereby become the "owner" of the mitzvah, unlike the shocheit in Rabban Gamliel's case, who was already obligated in the mitzvah.

The Rosh closes his discussion with the following words: "However, if the father does not want to perform the milah, all Jews are obligated to perform the bris. The words that the father spoke to the mohel did not have sufficient weight to transfer ownership of this mitzvah to him, thus making it impossible to fine a second person who performed the mitzvah, albeit without permission." Based on this Rosh, the Rema (Choshen Mishpat 382:1) concludes that someone who performed the bris on a child whose father was intending to carry it out himself must pay the father ten gold coins, but if the father asked a mohel to perform the bris, then the interloping mohel is absolved of any fine. Can the father make an agent?

The following question is raised relative to the comments of the Rosh: We see from the Rosh that the interloping mohel who takes the mitzvah away from the father is fined, whereas if he takes the mitzvah from a different mohel, he is not. But why is this so? In the latter instance, he also "stole" the mitzvah from the father, since the first mohel was the father's agent, and the interloping mohel was not? Thus, the father would have fulfilled the mitzvah through his agent had the first mohel performed the bris, but he was deprived of the mitzvah by the second mohel (Ketzos Hachoshen 382:2).

There are a few ways to resolve this question. The Ketzos Hachoshen concludes that when the Torah gave the father a mitzvah to circumcise his child, the Torah was not simply asking him to make sure that his son has a bris, but was requiring the father to perform the bris himself. The father cannot make a mohel an agent to circumcise his son, just as one cannot make an agent to don tefillin. Neither of these mitzvos can be performed through agency. Therefore, when the father asks a mohel to perform the bris for him, he is demonstrating that he does not intend to perform this mitzvah himself, and the second mohel did not steal it from him. This appears to be the way the Shach (Choshen Mishpat 382:4) understood the Rosh also, and for this reason he writes: "We can demonstrate from the words of this Rosh that a father who is a mohel is not permitted to give the mitzvah to someone else... I saw many men who are capable of performing the bris themselves who honor others with the mitzvah. In my opinion, they thereby are abrogating the important mitzvah of milah. The local beis din should take action to stop this."

Everyone is an agent

However, there is an alternative way to explain the Rosh, which reaches a different conclusion. The Mishneh Lamelech (Bechoros end of 4:1; see also Terumas Hadeshen #188) contends that once someone revealed that he does not want to do a mitzvah himself, anyone who performs it is his agent. Therefore, when a father appoints someone to perform his son's bris, any Jew who properly performs the bris milah is now acting as the father's agent. The second mohel did not deprive the father of any mitzvah.

According to the second approach, no matter who performs the bris, the father has fulfilled the mitzvah, and he is not in violation for appointing an agent. However, if this is true, why does the Or Zarua prohibit a father from appointing someone to circumcise his son? The Tevuos Shor explains that there is a difference between honoring someone else to perform the mitzvah that one would prefer to do, which is permitted, and having someone else perform a mitzvah because one is not interested to perform it. In the latter case, failure to fulfill the mitzvah oneself violates mitzvah bo yoseir mibishlucho. The Tevuos Shor thus concludes that one may appoint someone else to do the milah. He also concludes that it is permitted for a shocheit to honor someone else with performing kisuy hadam. As I mentioned above, there are other authorities who disagree with this conclusion.

Conclusion:

The following anecdote about Rav Pam demonstrates his observing the principle of mitzvah bo yoseir mibishlucho. Someone offered to mail a letter for him, but Rav Pam told him that he preferred to mail the letter himself, since it was a donation to tzedakah. Since mailing the letter is part of the mitzvah, one should do it himself, because of mitzvah bo yoseir mibishlucho.