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THE COMFORT ZONE Rabbi Berel Wein

The seven weeks that stretch from Tisha B'Av until Rosh Hashana are the seven weeks of comfort – shiva d'nechemta. The haftorot that are read on the Sabbath during these seven weeks are all taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah and predict better times ahead for Israel and humankind generally. The Hebrew word nechama, which is usually translated as comfort or condolence, has a deeper meaning than the English translation of that word conveys. It has a nuance of menucha – rest, repose – attached to it. The Jewish notion of comfort does not mean to sublimate and forget the tragedy of the past. Rather it means to deal with it somehow in the best way humanly possible and move forward in life. Mourning is part of Jewish life and memory. Yet the halacha shapes and restricts it, not allowing it to dominate one's life as to render one permanently incapacitated. Comfort in Judaism means the ability to put some things, no matter how sad and painful, to rest. We no longer dwell on Tisha B'Av and its tragedies that are omnipresent within the ache of our past, but rather we move on to the forthcoming new year and its holidays and better hopes. We never forget the past but we are not allowed to be paralyzed by its memories. That is the true message of nechama – comfort and solace.

The truth be said, Jews are uncomfortable with the usual message of being comforted. There is a restlessness amongst us that does not allow us to just sit back in comfort and fully relax. Perhaps it is the strong sense of mortality, of the realization that time and life are very fleeting, that drives us. The rabbis of the Talmud decried the wasting of time. Though leisure and relaxation are necessary components of healthy living, they are not seen as the main goals in one's life. The Midrash commented upon our father Jacob's desire to sit back in comfort and contentment after his difficult past encounters with Esau and Lavan by saying: "Is it insufficient that the righteous are rewarded in the World to Come that they should wish comfort in this world as well?" The righteous people of society are not allowed to be passive people, hermits or recluses. Righteousness is a proactive occupation. It remembers and learns from the past but its goals are always in the future. Comfort in its ordinary and superficial sense is a temporary and short-term status. Righteousness and true nechama are always long-term projects and goals. Nechama is never expediency or panaceas. It is rather the dedication to achieving these necessary long-range goals and a healthy individual and national psyche.

Perhaps this is the reason that a full seven weeks of the Jewish calendar year is devoted to the idea of nechama – comfort. The process of healing and moving on is a complicated and lengthy one. One haftorah, no matter how lofty the prose and comforting the message may be, will not suffice to truly comfort Israel. Only time and the rededication to new and better achievements, both spiritual and national, can create a climate of comfort. Seven weeks of such incessant messages of comfort and Jewish nechama, leading to the exalted Days of Awe, the times of forgiveness and hope and of renewed commitment to the eternal values of Judaism, are necessary to infuse us with the true balm of nechama. In a world that is continually looking for a quicker fix and ever faster computers and internet, the virtue of patience, which is the

cornerstone of nechama is often overlooked and ignored. Seven weeks may be a long time to wait for comfort to sink in but it is worth the wait. The Jewish people had to wait seven weeks from the time of their exodus from Egypt until they received the Torah at Sinai. That too was worth the wait. Apparently the Torah prescribes seven weeks as the proper time period to allow a sense of perspective and commitment to develop within a person. Therefore, this seven week period of time which we are now in

the midst of becomes our true comfort zone – our period of nechama and rededication. Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha VAETCHANAN Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha contains two of the basic pillars of the Jewish faith - the Shema and the Ten Commandments of Sinai. This parsha also contains Moses' plea for entry into the Land of Israel - an entry that is denied to him – and the explicit warning that the stay of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel is conditional upon the people's loyalty to the God of Israel and to the Torah. Thus the Land of Israel is also seen as a supreme value in Jewish life – hence, Moses' prayers and entreaties to be allowed to enter there – but its importance is nevertheless dependent on Israel's worship of God and the study and observance of His Torah. This interdependence too is one of the pillars of Judaism established for us in this parsha. The Land of Israel as a Jewish value can only exist and flourish if it is kept in tandem with the other basic values enunciated in the parsha – the Shema and the Ten Commandments from Sinai. As a singular, isolated value in itself, it will be unable to support the structure of the house of Israel. In these difficult, heart-wrenching days, we here in Israel, are painfully aware of this statement. The Land of Israel is a religious value to Jews, not merely a national one. Cut adrift from its religious moorings, it will eventually, over time merely drift away in the sea of problems, adversities and lost ideals.

This parsha, as is part of every other parsha in the book of Dvarim as well, emphasizes a review of the Jewish past. The past plays a major role in all Jewish life and thought. The past is our reference point for where we are currently. Moshe constantly reviews and recalls the past – Egypt, Sinai, the sojourn in the desert, etc. – in order to instruct and inspire the people for the tasks that lie ahead. When walking uphill here in Jerusalem (and wherever one walks it is always uphill) I often stop and turn around to survey how much of the hill I have already traversed. I gain heart and renewed vigor at seeing how far I have already come going up that hill. I think that the same is true for the Jewish people generally and especially at this time. Seeing how far we have come after the disasters of the past century, knowing our past both distant and near, is a necessary component for continuing to climb our hill. The Torah always emphasizes knowledge of the past. We pray to the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, we constantly recall the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation of Sinai. We are obsessed with our past for this is the only way to assure our future. Moshe's review of the past is timely in all generations. It will continue to strengthen us in our current hour of need. Shabat shalom

TORAH WEEKLY

Parshat Va'etchanan

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

OVERVIEW

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special mitzvot. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah - that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on Bnei Yisrael that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins Bnei

Yisrael to “pass over” the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when Bnei Yisrael dwell in Eretz Yisrael they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the Shema, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The parsha ends with Moshe exhorting Bnei Yisrael not to intermarry when they enter Eretz Yisrael, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

INSIGHTS

PrayerLine 2

“And I beseeched G-d at that time, saying...” (3:23)

One of the most difficult things to do is to pray.

Nobody has trouble praying when someone is going into the operating theater for a life or death operation, G-d forbid. No one has a problem praying when they walk into the exam hall for an exam that they have only half reviewed. No one has a problem praying when his wife is in the delivery room. The difficult thing is praying on a day-to-day basis. Day in, day out. That’s difficult. How many times do we catch ourselves drifting off in the middle of praying, thinking about business, or someone we saw the other day, or the new toy we want to buy/have bought/shouldn’t have bought? It’s not by coincidence that Hebrew word for prayer is avoda which literally means “work.” Prayer is work. There’s no way around that. But prayer can also be one of the most uplifting human activities. Anyone who ever prayed well, even once, knows that the world is a completely different place after such an experience.

Apart from our own in-built problems with prayer, there’s something else that stops us from being able to pray properly. We are literally bombarded from cradle to grave, morning till night with thousands and thousands of images. Images on billboards, in newspapers, books, billboards, buses. Everywhere you look. Everywhere you look an image is trying to invade your head and take up vast amounts of valuable real estate in your consciousness.

It is said of Rabbi Baruch Ber Leibowitz, one of the great pre-war Torah luminaries, that when he went to the store to buy something, he would pull out some loose change from his pocket and motion the storekeeper to take the necessary amount from his cupped hand. The reason was that Rabbi Baruch Ber had never learned the difference between a five kopek piece and a ten. Why would someone of Reb Baruch Ber’s stature have omitted learning the currency system of the country in which he lived? The answer is that everything takes up space in one’s head, and he was not prepared to give up even the smallest piece of mental real estate that might interfere with his Torah learning or his prayer.

Part of the curse of living in exile is that we have so much “stuff” floating around in our heads that it makes it very difficult to focus on our spirituality.

“And I beseeched G-d at that time, saying...”

In the above sentence, the phrase “At that time...” hints to a prayer for generations unborn. Whenever the Jewish People will find themselves in times of anguish, unable to pray properly because of the mental subjugation of exile, Moshe’s prayer will arise for us.

And even in the most mind-numbing apathy, when the cord of prayer to the lips has been disconnected from our hearts and all we can do is merely utter the words, Moshe’s prayer will arise for us. “At that time”, when all we will be able to do is “saying” and there will be no feeling in our words, Moshe’s prayer will arise in front of G-d to breathe life into our empty words.

Based on the Amshenover Rebbe

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L’sheim Shomayim

Acting l’sheim shomayim (for the sake of heaven) is one of the overarching principles of Judaism (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 238). But how do we ascertain that we are acting truly l’sheim shomayim?

On the one hand, it is simple and straightforward. All we have to do is look into our hearts and be honest with ourselves. On the other hand, however, it is somewhat complex. We have a remarkable capacity for self-deception. This capacity is a necessary part of the gift of bechira chofshis (free will). Bechira chofshis includes the freedom to deny truth - even about ourselves. Hence the complexity in ascertaining that we are acting truly l’sheim shomayim. We may think that we are acting l’sheim shomayim, but are we fooling ourselves?

Yiras Shomayim

You shall not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person and you shall have fear of your God - I am Hashem (Vayikra 19:14)

You shall have fear of your God - since this matter is not given to people to know if the intent of the person [who gives the bad advice] is for good or for bad, and he is able to escape blame, and to say, “I meant well,” therefore it is said about him “and you shall have fear of your God” who recognizes your thoughts. And so, too, anything that is given over to the heart of the person who does it and which other people can’t recognize, of it, it is said, “and you shall have fear of your God.” (Rashi ad loc., Artscroll translation)

When we can deceive others, the Torah exhorts us “you shall have fear of your God.” Hashem can not be deceived, and we are accountable to Him. Yiras shomayim (fear of heaven) holds in check the yetser harah to deceive others. And, by extension - yiras shomayim can also hold in check the yetser harah to deceive ourselves. Admittedly we have a capacity for self-deception, but, conversely, we also have a matching capacity for self-awareness. Yiras shomayim can be instrumental in activating the latter and suppressing the former.

Yiras shomayim not only counters the impulse to self-deception and fosters self-awareness. It also cultivates the capacity for altruistic l’sheim shomayim conduct. Simply put: one who has deep-seated yiras shomayim and is keenly aware of and preoccupied with Hakadosh Baruch Hu is likely to act genuinely l’sheim shomayim.

Consistency

An important indicator in assessing the l’sheim shomayim of our actions and beliefs is consistency. Inconsistency invariably exposes deception and/or self-deception. The Beis Halevi (on parshas Vayigash) offers this penetrating insight in explaining the apparent redundancy of the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (3:1).

Da...lifnei mi attah asid litein din v’cheshbon - Know...before Whom you will give justification (din) and reckoning (cheshbon).

Din, explains the Beis Halevi, refers to each of our actions judged individually. Cheshbon refers to the amalgam of our actions. Cheshbon scrutinizes the internal consistency of our actions. For instance, if we will plead poverty or lack of means as justification for miserly tzedakka habits, the heavenly court will review all of our expenditures. We will be asked to explain why we were wealthy enough to take expensive vacations, live in opulent homes and the like, but too poor to give tzedakka. Inconsistency highlights deception and/or self-deception.

Let us consider a few examples. Anger is a destructive impulse. Inflamed passions lead to impulsive, vindictive speech and conduct. In anger, we say and do regrettable things. And not only are they regrettable, at times, they are also irreversible. Moral outrage, on the other hand, is a noble sentiment. We should be passionate in opposing injustice, falsehood, and evil. “I have hated falsehood and abhorred it.” (Tehillim 119:163) “O lovers of hashem, despise evil!” (Tehillim 97:10)

When someone wrongs us, we react passionately. We think - or at any rate, we would like to think - that we are feeling moral outrage l’sheim shomayim, and not narcissistic anger. But which is it? The test is very simple. Are we consistent - viz., do we react as forcefully and

passionately when others are wronged? If so, we are feeling moral outrage. But if not, then we are feeling personal, selfish anger - a destructive impulse that must be avoided.

When a parent strikes a child, is he/she doing so for the child's welfare - convinced that there is no better form of discipline possible?[1] Or is the parent acting out of frustration (for some parents, the frustration quotient in parenting spikes at times) and anger, rationalizing to himself "I'm doing this for the child's best interest. It is a mitzvah"? Consistency test: when the child misbehaves but the parent's nerves are not frazzled is he equally inclined to strike the child? When the parent decides to hit the child, is he/she calm, objective, and dispassionate in making that decision? Or is the parent feeling frustrated and angry, emotions which cloud one's judgment. If the parent is feeling frustrated and angry, it is virtually certain that in part if not in full, he is not acting l'sheim shomayim. He is venting his frustration and anger.

In virtually every case of parents hitting children that I have witnessed, the parent manifested unmistakable signs of anger and/or frustration. Such discipline does not teach children right from wrong. The overriding message children receive in such situations is that parents, instead of controlling anger and developing patience, vent anger by hitting their children.

Another example, of a different variety, of utilizing the consistency test. In contemporary ideological discussion and debate, we often levy charges of revisionism, cataloguing what we consider various instances of revisionism. In doing so, we ostensibly act l'sheim shomayim, as zealots for truth. But are we zealots for truth or simply seeking to discredit ideological opponents? Or perhaps we are pandering to a certain constituency? Consistency test: do we adduce examples from the entire ideological spectrum or only from one side ("left", "right") of the spectrum? If the latter, does this group being assailed have a monopoly on revisionism? Once we recognize our inconsistency, the self-questioning should proceed. How many examples that we cite are really instances of revisionism, and how many are interpretations with which we disagree? The consistency test, honestly administered and uncensored, can be very revealing.

One final example, also drawn from contemporary ideological discussion and debate. Many "hot-button" issues are currently being debated in the public square. Some of these are women's issues - role of women, aliyas, and so on. There are many other issues as well - for instance, the boundaries of legitimate tolerance and openness. Many people are very opinionated in such matters, passionately advocating a particular point of view. Some go beyond advocacy and introduce change and innovation. And, of course, ostensibly everything is said and done l'sheim shomayim. But is the advocacy truly l'sheim shomayim? Or, perhaps is it self-serving, remaking halachah in our image in concert with our predilections?

Consistency test: do we maintain the same professional standards for the resolution of halachic issues that we insist upon in other contexts? For instance, in complex medical affairs we seek - as we should - the best, most expert medical care and guidance. If need be, we travel the world to seek out an expert. For a laymen or even an undistinguished doctor to make decisions or even advocate in complex medical issues would be reckless. We would not allow it. How many of us - laymen and rabbonim alike - are entitled to even express an opinion, much less advocate, in complex halachic matters? If, lack of qualifications notwithstanding, we persist in advocating on halachic matters, are we truly doing so l'sheim shomayim? The consistency test, honestly administered and uncensored, can be very revealing.

[1] By no means, am I assuming that, in our day, corporal punishment is desirable even with the purest of motives (see Rav Shlomo Wolbe's *Planting & Building: Raising a Jewish Child*.) My point is that even if one does approve of corporal punishment it must meet the standard of l'sheim shomayim.

PARSHAS VAESCHANAN

From there you will seek Hashem, your G-d, and you will find Him, for you will seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (4:29)

Hopelessness is a dangerous and destructive condition. The Torah is teaching us that this condition is all in the mind. One who feels hopeless, who is falling into the brink of despair, should know that it is all a ruse. Regardless of how bitter and dreary the future or the present may seem, his feeling of despair is nothing more than a delusion. Horav Nachman zl, m'Breslov was wont to say, "Despair does not exist." Sure, there are many people walking around depressed, but that is only in their minds. They should not be that way. No matter how low one has sunk, he can still return and establish a relationship with the Almighty. This is the pasuk's message. Regardless of where we are, how depressed we are feeling, we can still find Hashem.

Furthermore, he who thinks that he cannot find Hashem in his life should remember the words of the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, who supplemented our pasuk, "You will seek Hashem... and you will find Him." Seeking Hashem is to find Him. The actual search has profound meaning and is not in vain. Unlike the search for a treasure, which is fruitless if the treasure is not located, the search for Hashem is a goal in itself. The yearning to come closer to the Almighty, to work on oneself as a means of getting closer to Hashem, is in fact an aspect of discovery. The process of seeking is in its own right a function of the discovery and the mark of success.

Yearning and seeking, whether in order to get closer to Hashem or in order to develop a greater depth and understanding of His Torah, are what makes the difference in ascending the ladder of success. The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, refer to this process as bakoshas chochmah, seeking wisdom. In order to acquire wisdom, one must yearn for it and overcome every obstacle in his quest for wisdom. The symbol of the true mevakesh, seeker, is Yehoshua, Moshe Rabbeinu's successor. In Bamidbar 27:18, the Torah records Hashem's instructions to Moshe, "Take to yourself Yehoshua bin Nun, a man in whom there is spirit." Sforno comments: "He is prepared and ready to accept the light of the Countenance of the Living King, as it says, 'And I have endowed the heart of every wise-hearted person with wisdom.'" (Shemos 31:6). Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, derives from here that Yehoshua was singled out due to his overwhelming desire to acquire wisdom. One who is a mevakesh, who is prepared to absorb the eternal verities of the Torah, deserves success.

During the forty days and nights that Moshe was on Har Sinai, Yehoshua camped at the base of the mountain waiting for his rebbe to return. He did not want to lose a minute. As soon as his rebbe descended, he would be there waiting, prepared and ready to serve him. And what would have been so bad if he would have waited the few minutes it would have taken Moshe to walk to camp? No! Bakoshas chochmah demands that every minute is important, every minute has something to teach, every minute provides us with something to learn.

Logic dictates this point. It makes sense that something is given to the individual who appreciates and values it. Otherwise, it does not achieve its potential. One who values Torah knowledge will do everything to acquire it. Such a person is worthy of being invested with Torah. He will appreciate and care for the gift of Torah.

For Hashem, Your G-d, is a merciful G-d, He will not abandon you nor destroy you. (4:31)

Hashem is a compassionate and merciful G-d, whose sensitivity to our needs goes beyond anything we can possibly fathom. Yet, we see activities that clearly seem to contradict this statement. We have only to peruse history or to look around any community to observe the tragic incidents that have occurred. Which community has not had its share of grief? Who does not know someone that has suffered a loss? This is only a reference to the overt incidents that reach the public. What about those who suffer in silence, because they have no one with whom to share their

pain? Yet, we refer to Hashem as all-merciful and compassionate. How are we to understand this?

Since Parashas Va'Eschanan corresponds with Shabbos Nachamu, I take the liberty of citing Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, who relates the following words of neshamah, consolation, which were shared by a Rosh Yeshivah who came to comfort a young family that had sustained a tragic loss. A number of years ago, Hashem called to one of the fine and pure neshamos, souls, in Heaven and notified it that the time had come for it to descend to this world. When the neshamah heard this announcement, it shuddered with fear. "How can I descend to such a world? How can I leave such a world of purity and sanctity to live in a world where moral decay is a way of life and spiritual contamination is acceptable - and even laudatory? Who knows in what image I will return? Please, Hashem, do not make me go!" the neshamah begged.

It made no difference; Hashem's decision had been made. "I promise you that I will place you with a wonderful family, with loving, righteous parents, Torah scholars who are replete in yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. They will provide you with an excellent Torah education and see to it that you remain within a strong, positive Torah environment. When you become an adult, I will see to it that you marry a Torah scholar who will devote his life to the pursuit of Torah knowledge. Together, you will merit to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael, a home true to the eternal values of Klal Yisrael."

Yet, the neshamah refused to descend to this world, for fear that it might become spiritually tarnished. Hashem then promised that she would be here no longer than thirty short years. This short lifespan would not allow for much opportunity for a spiritual breakdown. This was still not enough, however, to calm the neshamah. "Just in case something goes wrong, I request that the last four years of my life be filled with illness and excruciating pain, so that whatever indiscretions I may have performed will be cleansed for me," demanded the neshamah.

Hashem agreed, and this very special neshamah was sent down to this world. "This neshamah was the soul of your wife/daughter," said the rosh yeshivah. "She was so special and so unique that she acquiesced to descend to this world only on the condition that her tenure here be short and that she go through a process of purification prior to her return. You have been blessed and entrusted with a very special neshamah whose time to return has come."

We now have a different perspective on the "behind the scenes" activity concerning one who leaves this world as a young age. Another perspective is shared by Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, who was asked to speak to a group of yeshivah students who had suffered the loss of one of their close friends. The student was an incredible young man who had been raised in a non-observant home and had developed into a distinguished Torah scholar. The students of the yeshivah were devastated by the tragic loss, and they could not cope. Rav Sholom, the venerable Maggid of Yerushalayim, was well-known for his ability to find the right words to say. It was felt that he could reach the students about their loss to console them.

Rav Sholom related the following story. It was Yerushalayim in the late 1920's, and poverty was rampant. It got to the point that the rabbanim decided to send one of their own to America to raise funds for the many Jews and organizations that were falling prey to abject poverty. Rabbi Volk was charismatic and a powerful, inspirational speaker. He was asked to represent the Jews of the Holy Land. After covering the major communities on the east coast, he traveled to the midwest. Chicago was his first stop. It was a wealthy community that responded to his oratory. His words melted their hearts, and many individuals opened their wallets to help the needy of the Holy Land. Among the major contributors was Rav Yerachmiel Wexler, who, besides writing a sizable check, was so moved by Rav Volk's sermon that he decided to sell his business in the states and relocate to Eretz Yisrael. There he planned to purchase a number of fields and orchards to provide food for the needy.

It was the winter of 1929 when Rav Yerachmiel left for Eretz Yisrael together with his twenty year old son. Upon visiting Yeshivas Chevron, he was impressed by the student body, especially with a number of American boys who were studying there. The students related to him how wonderful it was to study Torah in the Holy Land. Why not allow his son to remain in the yeshivah for a while. It would certainly change his life. It was decided: Yechezkel Wexler would remain in Chevron. He was determined to grow spiritually in Torah and mitzvos. All went well for the duration of the winter, until that summer when, on Av 18, the yeshivah was attacked by maniacal Arab hordes, and a number of yeshivah students were slaughtered Al Kiddush Hashem. Yechezkel Wexler was one of them.

It was a terrible tragedy, one that reverberated throughout the world. Rav Volk felt a taint of responsibility. After all, his inspirational sermon had catalyzed the process of the family's aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. He just could not face Rav Yerachmiel Wexler. Indeed, he did everything possible to avoid contact with him. Although Rav Volk did not go to Chicago, Chicago came to him. One day, as he was walking to an appointment in New York, he was confronted by Rav Yerachmiel Wexler. "Why do we not see you anymore in Chicago?" Rav Yerachmiel queried. Rav Volk was not very adept at covering up the truth. "I have not come, because I was afraid that you blame me for the tragedy that befell your son," responded Rav Volk.

"Why should you be afraid of me? What did you do? On the contrary, it is I who owe you a debt of gratitude. Indeed, you have no idea of the wonderful kindness that you did for my family and me," Rav Yerachmiel countered.

"Let me explain," he continued. I had a son, Yechezkel, whom I loved very much. Forty days prior to his birth, it had been decreed that he would only live to be twenty years old. That decree was unalterable. Now, had he not gone to Eretz Yisrael at your suggestion, he might have lived and died just as any other American boy - with little Torah, less mitzvos and hardly any yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Luckily, you inspired us to go to the Holy Land where, as a yeshivah bachur, he died Al Kiddush Hashem. Thanks to you, my son died as a yeshivah bachur!"

Rav Sholom explained that the length of a person's stay on this world has been decided by Hashem even before the individual arrives here. How he lives, and on what spiritual plane he will be at the time of his passing, are determined by his actions. He makes that decision. Baruch Hashem, the young yeshivah student that had passed away in the prime of his life was ensconced in a Torah environment, steeped in yiraas Shomayim and totally committed to Hashem. His neshamah left this world while he was climbing the ladder of spiritual success. He was one of the lucky ones.

You shall love Hashem your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. (6:5)

If we explore the text of Krias Shema, we note that in the first passage, we are enjoined to love Hashem "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." In the second passage, however, it states, "If you listen to My commandments to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, then I shall provide" (11:13-14). The third phrase, u'bechal me'odecha, and with all your might, is deleted in this passage. Why is there a change between the first and second passages?

In order to understand this distinction, we must first bear in mind that Chazal render a different translation to b'chol me'odecha. They interpret it to mean, "with all your money." We are enjoined to love Hashem, even if it involves a financial loss. One more distinction between the passages to be considered is that in modern English we do not distinguish between the singular "you," and the plural "you." In the Shema, the first paragraph is written in the singular, while the second paragraph is written in the plural.

The Torah commands us to love Hashem with all our heart and all our soul (our very lives). This concept applies both on individual and communal levels, thus appearing in both of the passages of the Shema.

With regard to one's obligation to love Hashem with all of his belongings, even if it means incurring a financial loss, the Torah makes demands only on the individuals. It is not something that can be invoked upon the entire community as a whole. Giving up one's possessions out of love for the Almighty is an individual requirement. It cannot be imposed collectively.

You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart... and you shall teach (the words of Torah) to your children. (6:5,7)

People declare their unswerving commitment to Hashem constantly. Do they mean it or is it just an overstatement? In a letter to Horav Yissachar Dov Teichtal, zl, Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, writes the following observation. The Torah commands us to love Hashem with all our heart and all our soul. How does one actualize this love? How does he express it? The Torah responds to this question by juxtaposing the mitzvah to teach Torah to one's children, upon the mitzvah to love Hashem. By raising our children to study Torah, we demonstrate our love for Hashem. We often make declarations affirming our commitment to and love, for, the Almighty. When we look at it realistically, however, do we really mean what we are saying? Do we sincerely love Hashem? If we did, we would want our children to spend their lives immersed in Torah study. Our greatest hope would be to see our children shine as Torah scholars. Is this true? Are we like that? Yet, we have no qualms about declaring our love for the Almighty. Perhaps, it would be wise to think before we speak or to act before we declare.

Va'ani Tefillah

Eizehu mekoman shel zevachim

In order to develop a better understanding of the Korbanos and their individual significances, it is important to understand the layout of the Bais Hamikdash, the placement of the Klei Hamikdash, various holy vessels, in association with the specific sides/corners of the Mikdash. The Temple Sanctuary consisted of three chambers. The first was the Kodoshei Kodoshim, Holy of Holies, situated in the western side. It was also referred to as Dvir, the Abode of the Word, Dvir being a derivative of daber, to speak. This name was based on the fact that the Aron Hakodesh - containing within it the Luchos and the original Sefer Torah written personally by Moshe Rabbeinu - reposed there. Second, to the east of the Kodoshei Kodoshim was the Heichal, Abode of G-d's might. It was separated from the rest of the Mikdash by the Dividing Curtain, called Paroches. At the northern side of the Heichal was placed the Shulchan, Table; opposite it, on the southern side of the Heichal was the Menorah, Candelabrum, and in between these two vessels, slightly forward in the direction of the entrance, was the Mizbayach HaZahav, Golden Altar, which was used for burning the Ketores, Incense. Third, in front of the Heichal, to the east, was the Azarah, Ante-court, something like the Chatzer, Courtyard, of the Mishkan, the Bais Hamikdash's predecessor in the wilderness. In the Azarah was placed the Mizbayach HaOlah, the Altar upon which the sacrifices were offered. The entrance to the Sanctuary was in the eastern portion of the Azarah, opposite the Kodoshei Hakodoshim.

In memory of JACK FOGEL OB" M In loving memory of our dear Mother & Bubby Mrs. Chana Silberberg, Zev & Miriam Solomon & Family

KOL TORAH

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Vaetchanan - A Hope and a Prayer

by Rabbi Darren Blackstein

Parshat Vaetchanan contains what many would consider to be the most famous and perhaps meaningful verse in our theology, the Shema. One would imagine that such an important verse would carry with it a clear message, free from the normal array of opinions that accompany other verses. This is only partially true. While this verse does carry with it the

clear message of Hashem's unity, it also carries with it many ways for this message to be taken.

Rashi explains that the Shema tells us that at this time in history, only our people recognize that Hashem is God ("Elokeinu"). There will come a time when the whole world will come to this realization and accept that Hashem is the One true Deity. Rashi seems to understand the Shema primarily as a message of hope for the future. Being the chosen people may be a privilege, but the inherent loneliness is troubling. Ideally, Hashem should enjoy the worship of all people; it would seem a lack of honor to give Hashem anything less. Indeed, this verse has become a prayer that represents the eternal hope that we all have for a time when all mankind can unite and, in turn, reflect the unity of Hashem.

Whereas Rashi entertains a worldview based on the Shema, the Sforno tells us that the Shema is a statement containing truths which must be deeply contemplated. The Shema is a message to Bnei Yisrael urging us to accept Hashem as the Creator upon whom all existence depends. Since all existence stems from Hashem, He is the only one to whom it makes sense to pray. With this idea in mind, we can then contemplate the unique quality of Hashem as the only being responsible for all existence, thereby testifying to His singularity. There is no other being like Him and His unity cannot be matched. We see, according to the Sforno, that the Shema contains personal ideas of religious depth that must be meditated upon and analyzed over and over as we accept the yoke of Hashem's kingdom. As a vehicle for prayer, this verse is crucial in our attempt to connect with the Almighty and to feel His presence.

While these are only two opinions about the functionality of the Shema, we can readily see that the Shema is meant for us to use, not only in a personal way, but also in a way that helps us have more positive contact with the world around us. May we all merit to focus on this verse in our davening and experience the contributions it can make in our lives.

The Weekly-Halacha

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt, Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav

QUESTION: What are the possible halachic problems and solutions regarding adoption?

A. Is it proper?

When the adoption process conforms to halachic guidelines, it is considered to be an extremely noble and rewarding deed. In numerous places in the Talmud, our Sages praise one who raises another person's child as his own(1).

B. Child's origin - Jew or non-Jew?

Both of these choices have their advantages and disadvantages. Theoretically, a Jewish child would be preferable, since it is a great mitzvah to raise a Jewish child who may otherwise not have a Jewish home. In practice, however, it may prove difficult to verify the lineage (yichus) of the child, in which case unforeseen problems may arise regarding the child's future entry into a Jewish marriage. Thus, before adopting a Jewish child, one should thoroughly investigate the child's background to clarify his yichus.

A non-Jewish child, however, has no yichus problem. At the time of adoption the child undergoes conversion, which allows the child to marry any person permitted to wed a convert. The drawback, however, is that the child must(2) be told of his conversion when he or she reaches the age of maturity, thirteen for a boy and twelve for a girl. At that time, the child is given the option to reject the earlier conversion which took place without his consent. Should the child choose to reject his conversion, he would be considered a non-Jew. Obviously, a non-Jew would not be adopted or raised as one's own child.

C. How close a relationship?

Adopted children should be told of their origin at the earliest possible time(3). People who choose to hide the origin of their adopted children

from them may unwittingly cause grave halachic hardships or complications in the future and it is forbidden to do so(4).

Although in a spiritual sense an adopted child may be considered as one's own child, the poskim stress that this does not apply to physical contact. Yichud (being alone), hugging, kissing, etc., are not permitted as they are with one's natural child. Most poskim strictly forbid this type of physical contact(5). Yichud with an adopted child may even be more stringent than with a stranger, since it would fall under the category of "libo gas bah"(6). [Note that these halachos apply to foster children and stepchildren as well.]

There is, however, a view(7) that tends to be lenient on this issue. This view holds that when a child is adopted at a young age, we assume that a basic father/daughter or mother/son relationship has developed between them. We do not fear that any illicit relations will take place and hence do not restrict the parents from treating their adopted children as their own. This leniency applies only to children who were adopted before the age when yichud is prohibited, three for a girl and nine for a boy. A couple may not adopt a child of an older age unless they observe all restrictions of yichud and physical contact(8).

Harav M. Feinstein(9) also holds that yichud is permitted with adopted children, but for a different reason. No adoptive father, he suggests, would dare commit an illicit act with his adoptive daughter for fear of being found out by his wife upon her return home. That intimidation factor alone is enough to permit yichud. Consequently, as long as both adoptive parents are alive, married and living together in one home, yichud with a stepchild [in their home] is permitted(10).

According to Harav Feinstein, it is also permitted to kiss and hug an adopted child, since the kissing and hugging is done as any parent does to his or her child, which is permitted(11). Others allow this only till the age of five or six(12). As we mentioned earlier, most poskim do not agree with this approach altogether. In their opinion, an adopted or a stepchild is just like any other stranger with whom yichud, hugging and kissing etc., are prohibited.

D. How is he called to the Torah?

The poskim disagree as to whether an adopted child should be called to the Torah as the son of the adoptive father(13). Harav S.Z. Auerbach(14) rules that if the biological father's name is known, then the child should be called to the Torah by that name. If the biological father's name is not known, then he may be called to the Torah as the son of the adoptive father.

FOOTNOTES:

1.Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky, among other eminent Torah giants, endorsed the practice for those unable to have children of their own - See Devar Halachah (addendum to fourth edition). See also Chazon Yechezkel (preface to Tosefta Yevamos). R' Shlomo Kluger (Chochmas Shelomo E.H. 1:1) holds that the mitzvah of procreation can be accomplished through adoption. Most other authorities do not agree with this.

2.Igros Moshe Y.D. 1:161-162; Kisvei Harav Henkin 2:86.

3.Harav Y. Kamenetsky (oral ruling) advised that adopted children be told of their origin before their teenage years.

4.Igros Moshe E.H. 4:64-2; Kisvei Harav Henkin 2:99; Minchas Yitzchak 4:49; 5:44; 9:140; Otzar ha-Poskim vol. 9, pg. 130; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 132).

5.Chazon Ish (quoted in Devar Halachah 7:20); Otzar ha-Poskim, vol. 9, pg. 132 - written responsum from Tehebener Rav and Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky;

Minchas Yitzchak 4:49; 9:140; Shevet ha-Levi 5:205; 6:196; Devar Yehoshua E.H. 3:16; Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 134. See also Yashiv Moshe pg. 191).

6.Devar Halachah 7:20.

7.Tzitz Eliezer 6:40-21; 7:44, 45. Note that his view is stated as a limud zechus and in order to make it easier for abandoned children to find good, Jewish homes that would adopt them.

8.Tzitz Eliezer, ibid.

9.Igros Moshe E.H. 4:64-2. See also E.H. 4:71 [concerning marrying a woman who has a daughter].

10.Harav Feinstein also does not limit this leniency, as the Tzitz Eliezer does, to a child who was adopted before the age of three for a girl or nine for a boy. See also Avnei Yashfei 2:89-12.

11.Based on the Shach Y.D. 157:10.

12.Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.Y. Neuwirth (quoted in Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 135).

13.Minchas Yitzchak 4:49; 5:46; 6:151 strictly prohibits this practice, while other contemporary poskim find room for this leniency - see Lev Aryeh 1:55 and Nachalas Tzvi pg. 31.

14.Quoted in Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 136. The same ruling applies to writing the adopted child's name in a kesubah or a get. See, however, igros Moshe E.H. 1:99.

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Halacha Talk

by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Snatching a Mitzvah

CHAPTER 1

A QUICK DAVENING

Yankel is in the year of mourning for his father and meticulously fulfills his filial responsibility to "daven for the amud." Finding himself one day at a Mincha minyan in an unfamiliar neighborhood, he races to the amud before anyone else gets a chance. After davening, a nicely dressed gentleman hands Yankel a business card and asks if he can speak to him for a second.

"Are you new in the neighborhood? I don't believe we have ever met before. My name is Irving Friedman."

"Mine is Yankel Schwartz. No, I don't live here. I was just passing through and needed a Mincha minyan."

"Oh, I would like to make your acquaintance. Could I trouble you for your phone number?"

Not suspecting anything, Yankel provides Irving Friedman with his home, business, and cell phone numbers. Friedman then asks him for his home address, which arouses Yankel's suspicion. "Why do you want to know?"

"Well I guess I should be straightforward with you," Irving continues. "I want you to be aware that you owe me a huge amount of money. You see, I have the chazakah of davening at the amud during this minyan. By grabbing the mitzvah, you stole from me nineteen brachos of the repetition of Shmoneh Esrei and two Kaddishim, for each of which you owe me ten gold coins. I have made the exact calculation on the back of my business card. If you doubt that you owe me this money, I suggest you discuss this matter with your own rav. Since you look like an ehrliche yid, I assume that you will attempt to pay me before Yom Kippur. However, if that is too difficult, I am willing to discuss a payment plan. You have my phone number on the card." With this, Irving Friedman (not his real name) got into his car and drove off.

A bit bewildered at this surprising turn of events, Yankel looked at the business card in his hand. The front of the card had Friedman's name, business address, and the title and logo of his business. On the back, Yankel found the following hand-written calculation:

Invoice:

19 brachos @ 10 gold dinar coins each = 190 gold dinar coins.

2 kaddishim @ 10 gold dinar coins each = 20 gold dinar coins.

Total 210 gold dinar coins.

Based on my research, these coins are worth between \$24 and \$200 each in contemporary dollars (see Shiurei Torah, pg. 302.) This makes a total outstanding debt of between \$5,040 and \$42,000.

I am willing to accept the lower sum, and I am willing to discuss a payment schedule.

Yours sincerely,

I. Friedman

CHAPTER 2

Yankel was shocked. He presumed that Irving Friedman was pulling his leg. Yet, Friedman's demeanor about the entire matter had been so business-like, that it did not seem Friedman was playing a prank on him. "Five grand for one Mincha. He must be kidding!!" was all Yankel could think.

Yankel now realized that his running to the amud was very presumptuous. Usually, one goes to the amud when asked by a gabbai, unless one has a regular chazakah to daven at the amud during that particular minyan. Yankel realized that his enthusiasm to always get the amud had clouded his reasonable judgment.

Back in his own shul and familiar turf, Yankel davened maariv at the amud uneventfully and then noticed his good buddy, Shmuel. Besides being a good friend, Shmuel is more learned than Yankel, and would be able to help him sort out what happened. Yankel told Shmuel about the day's events and showed him the business card.

"I know that the Gemara talks about charging someone ten gold coins for snatching a mitzvah, but I never heard of someone trying to collect it," was Shmuel's surprised reaction.

"Where do you think Friedman got this dollar figure?"

"He has a note on the card quoting 'Shiurei Torah, pg. 302.' This is a sefer on the subject of halachic measurements. I don't have the sefer, but let's see if the shul has a copy."

Sure enough, the shul library had a copy of Shiurei Torah by Rav Avrohom Chayim Na'eh, one of the gedolei poskim in Eretz Yisroel about sixty years ago. Shmuel located the chapter where the sefer discusses the halachic sources for determining the value of "ten gold coins," and indeed, Friedman's calculations were based on the conclusions of Shiurei Torah.

"What should I do? \$5,040 is a lot of money. Do I really owe him this much money because I davened mincha without checking if someone else had a right to the amud?" Yankel asked his friend.

"Maybe discuss the issue with the Rav."

CHAPTER 3

Still very disturbed about the matter, Yankel called Rav Cohen to schedule an appointment. By now, he regretted his rash mincha davening, and realized that it is far more important not to infringe on someone else's mitzvah than to daven at the amud.

At the appointed time, Yankel arrived at Rav Cohen's office and explained the whole story, showing him the calculation on the back of the business card.

Rav Cohen realized a halachic flaw in Mr. Friedman's argument, but felt that Yankel would benefit more if he found out this information a bit later. The sage knew that this was not the first time that Yankel's impetuous nature got him into trouble. This situation might help him realize not to be so rash.

Rav Cohen introduced Yankel to the halachic issues involved. "As we know from the Chumash, someone who shechts a bird has a mitzvah of "kisui hadam," to cover the blood with dirt. The Gemara (Bava Kamma 91b) tells us a story of a shocheit who shechted a bird and then, before he had a chance to fulfill the mitzvah, someone else covered the blood, thus snatching the mitzvah. The shocheit brought the offending party to a din Torah where the great Tanna Rabban Gamliel presided. Rabban Gamliel ruled that the 'mitzvah snatcher' must pay ten gold coins for taking someone else's mitzvah."

"But there he is being fined for taking away his mitzvah, not for the bracha," Yankel countered.

"Actually, the Gemara (Chullin 87a) asks exactly this question. The Gemara cites a case where someone grabbed someone else's right to lead the benching. In the time of the Gemara, when a group of people benched together, one person recited the entire benching aloud and the others listened attentively and answered amen when he finished each bracha. By hearing the brachos of the person reciting the benching, they fulfilled their obligation to bench.

"In this instance, someone else began the benching rather than the person who had the right. The Gemara discusses whether the person who benched must compensate for one mitzvah, which is ten gold coins, or for four brachos, which is forty coins."

Yankel, now keenly aware of the difference between ten coins and forty, lets out a sigh.

"How does the Gemara rule?" asked Yankel, hoping that the Gemara would rule in his favor and save him a lot of money. After all, if the Gemara rules that the entire benching is only one mitzvah, his nineteen snatched brachos, which are only one mitzvah, are worth only ten gold coins. However, if the Gemara rules that he must compensate per bracha, he must pay 190 gold coins. By some quick arithmetic, Yankel figured that this saves him at least \$4,500! He had never before realized before how much a Gemara discussion might be worth.

Rav Cohen realized what was going through Yankel's head. "Well, there are other issues that impact on your case, but the Gemara rules that he must pay forty gold coins."

The ramifications of this ruling were not lost on Yankel. "But what is he paying for? He didn't take anything."

"That is a really good question," responded the Rav patiently. "Rashi (Chullin 87a) explains that the mitzvah snatcher is paying for the reward that he deprived the other person of when the mitzvah was taken away."

"I didn't know you could put a price tag on a mitzvah's reward," Yaakov blurted out. "The reward for a mitzvah is priceless!"

The Rav could not miss this opportunity. "If that is so, then you are really getting a very good bargain."

"Why?"

"What is worth more, the mitzvos one observes, or the money being paid as compensation?"

"Put that way, I must admit that it is a bargain. But it is still a very expensive bargain!"

Yankel continued. "Are there any other instances of collecting money for someone taking away a mitzvah?"

"The Gemara discusses a din Torah raised by someone whose tree was overhanging a public area and could cause potential damage. Before he could trim the tree, someone else chopped down the problematic branches. The owner placed a claim in beis din against the chopper for snatching his mitzvah. The beis din sided with the owner that his mitzvah was indeed snatched."

"Shmuel told me that he never heard of anyone collect money for snatched mitzvos. Is there any discussion after the time of the Gemara about collecting for snatched mitzvos?"

"Tosafos discusses a case when someone was 'called up' for an aliyah, and another person went up for the aliyah instead, thus snatching two brachos away from the person who had a right to them."

"What chutzpah!" blurted out Yankel. Then, realizing the hypocrisy in his reaction, he added. "I shouldn't be the one to talk. If I had a little less chutzpah, I wouldn't have got into such hot water."

"Whatever happened to this aliyah snatcher?" queried Yankel.

"How much do you think he should have paid?" replied the Rav, cunningly waiting for the best time to reveal the rest of the story.

"Well, based on the benching case where he paid forty coins for four berachos, I would imagine the aliyah snatcher should pay twenty coins for two berachos, one before and one after the aliyah."

"You are catching on really well," complimented the Rav.

"Well, if I do end up financially poorer for this experience, at least I should end up a bit wealthier in Torah learning," concluded Yankel. "But what do the poskim rule?"

Rav Cohen decided it was now time to let Yankel in on the secret. "There is a dispute in this question between Rabbeinu Tam and his nephew, Rabbeinu Yitzchok. Rabbeinu Yitzchok rules exactly like you contended – the aliyah snatcher must pay twenty gold coins. However, Rabbeinu Tam ruled that he is not required to pay at all (Tosafos, Bava Kamma 91b s.v. vichiyavo)."

Yankel was on the edge of his chair. Maybe Rabbeinu Tam would be his savior!

“How did Rabbeinu Tam get him off the hook?” was all Yankel wanted to know.

Rav Cohen leaned toward Yankel, asking him, “Which act earns more reward, reciting a bracha or reciting amen?”

“I would assume reciting the bracha,” responded Yankel, “But because of the way you asked the question, I must be wrong.”

“Indeed, the Gemara (Berachos 53b) declares that it is greater to recite amen than to recite the bracha. Rabbeinu Tam understands this to mean that the person who answers amen receives more reward than the person who recites the bracha! He therefore concludes that the person who snatched the aliyah need not pay since the person who should have received the aliyah would receive even more reward for reciting amen to the bracha. Remember, the compensation is for losing reward and the aliyah snatcher did not take away any reward.”

“One second,” blurted out Yankel, “The guy who covered the blood also didn’t stop the shocheit from reciting amen. Why did he have to pay?”

“That is a really good question that the later poskim ask. There are two very different approaches to explain why Rabbeinu Tam agrees that the blood coverer must pay the shocheit. Some contend that he recited the bracha in a way that the shocheit did not hear the bracha and that is why he must pay. According to this approach, had the shocheit heard the bracha, he would not collect compensation for losing his mitzvah.

Others contend that the shocheit has two different claims, one for the mitzvah and the other for the bracha. Answering amen provides an even greater reward than reciting the bracha, so the shocheit does not collect for missing the bracha. However, the shocheit still lost the reward for performing the mitzvah, and for this loss he needs to be compensated (Sma 382:7; Shach and other commentaries ad loc.).”

“Is this why Shmuel said he never heard of someone trying to collect ten gold coins for a snatched mitzvah?”

“No, actually, the reason for this is a bit complicated,” began the Rav. “Technically, only a beis din whose members received the original semicha that Moshe Rabbeinu conferred to Yehoshua can enforce a financial claim. Since we no longer have this semicha, this would mean that no one could ever collect damages or a bad debt. To avoid this problem, Chazal instituted that one can collect damages or debts through any beis din. However, Chazal instituted this method of collecting only when a person suffered out of pocket losses, as he does in the case of a bad debt or an injury. When someone took another person’s mitzvah however, although this is a real loss, there was no out of pocket loss. The result of this is that a mitzvah snatcher owes money and should pay it, but there is no way to force him to pay the debt (Tosafos, Bava Kamma 91b s.v. vichiyavo). However, since there is definitely a moral obligation to pay, the aggrieved party is permitted to seize property as payment!”

Yankel nodded, showing that he understood. “In conclusion, according to many opinions, I owe Mr. Friedman a considerable amount of money. Does it make any difference that I was unaware that he had the right to the amud and didn’t know that I could become obligated to pay a huge sum of money?”

“It should not make any difference, since you owe him for taking away his reward, which is something that you did whether you realized it or not.”

“Do I also owe him for the two kaddishim? These are not brachos,” inquired Yankel.

“It would seem that Mr. Friedman considers them to be mitzvos, and from that perspective he is probably right. It is true that whether one snatched someone else’s bracha or his mitzvah, one is required to pay compensation for his lost reward. However, it is not clear from the poskim whether one must pay for depriving someone of a mitzvah that is not min haTorah (Yam Shel Shelomoh, Bava Kamma 8:60).”

“What about the fact that he said amen to my brachos. Does that get me off the hook? Do we paskin like Rabbeinu Tam?” The hope in Yankel’s voice was very obvious.

“Actually, there is a big dispute among poskim. Many rule like Rabbeinu Tam, but this is certainly not a universally held position (see Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 382 and commentaries).”

“What does the Rav paskin in this situation?”

I would suggest that one follow the decision of the Taz (end of Choshen Mishpat 382), who says that you should contact Mr. Friedman and apologize, and offer some compensation (Aruch Hashulchan 382:7).”

Yankel phoned Irving Friedman. After a few pleasantries, he apologized for having taken the “amud” from him that fateful afternoon, and discussed the conversation he had with Rav Cohen. He offered him some financial compensation, but far less than \$5000, which Friedman accepted, and that was the last time Yankel “chapped” an amud without asking beforehand

Parshat Va’etchanan 5765 - Special Features - OU.ORG

Meaning in Mitzvot

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

by Rabbi Asher Meir

ILUI NESHAMA - elevation of the soul after death Often good deeds done in memory of a dead person are designated as an ILUI NESHAMA - an elevation of the soul or spirit. For example, the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh says that repentance on the anniversary of the death of a parent causes the parent’s soul to ascend in paradise (Ch. 221:1). This concept is found in the Talmud in a number of places. Near the very end of tractate Berachot (64a) we find: “Torah scholars find no rest either in this world or in the World to Come, as it is said (Tehilim 84:8): They will go from strength to strength, to appear before HaShem in Zion.”

And in tractate Shabbat (152b-153a) we learn: “For twelve months the body still persists, and the soul ascends and descends; after twelve months, the body is nullified and the soul ascends and from then on never descends”.

One way of understanding this idea is that it is a natural extension of the reward for our actions in this world. It is true that what we do after we leave this world doesn’t have an impact on our reward, as it says in Avoda Zara (3a) “One who didn’t prepare on Erev Shabbat, what will he eat on Shabbat?” But the impact of a person’s acts may not be evident until after his passing. A person may during his lifetime inspire other people to study Torah, engage in acts of kindness, and so on; there is no question that he will receive a reward. But sometimes the acts done during one’s lifetime may continue to inspire others after one’s passing. Thus, it is appropriate to evaluate a person’s achievements even after his departure from this world.

Indeed, the Zohar identifies the various stages of the journey of the soul with a series of judgments (Vayakhel, II:199). At various times after death, a new judgment is done to re-evaluate a person’s impact on the world of the living. Some authors have written that each yearzeit (anniversary of the death) is a day of judgment; thus it is a natural time for the children or other people who were influenced by the departed to demonstrate the continuing positive impact of their life and deeds. One interesting passage contrasts the “intermediate” person, or BENONI, with the wicked. Shmuel stated that both are given over to a special angel, but the difference is that one has rest and the other lacks rest (Shabbat 152b). The Maharsha indicates that the BENONI, or partially righteous person, has rest, whereas the wicked person has no rest; he is constantly being tossed about. (The gemara there describes the wicked as being cast back and forth between two angels; one way of understanding this is that while there are many different paths to achieving righteousness and inner peace, this person didn’t settle in to any of them.)

However, Ramban (Shaar HaGemul) gives the opposite interpretation: it is the average person who has no rest. This runs parallel to the gemara (Rosh HaShana 16b) which states that the wicked and the righteous are

sealed immediately on Rosh HaShana, whereas specifically the intermediate person is given an extra opportunity to realize his potential, to continue his growth.

Pondering the concept of the ILUI NESHAMA should induce us to reflect on the loves of departed loved ones and consider how their personal example can continue to inspire us to good character and good deeds. May this column be an ILUI NESHAMA for Rabbi Yehoshua Shmidman of Montreal, who was buried this week in Jerusalem. His conduct inspired countless people to improve their character and deeds.

The OU/NCSY Israel Center - TORAH tidbits

Ohr Somayach :: Talmudigest :: Shabbat 100 - 106

Lessons of the Letters

Shabbat 104a

The letters of the alphabet of Lashon Hakodesh – the holy tongue of Hebrew – are no ordinary letters. Important lessons can be learned not only from the words they form but from the shape of each letter and its relation to the letter which follows it in the alphabet.

This was demonstrated by some scholars – referred to in our gemara as “children” but identified in the Jerusalem Talmud as Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua of an earlier generation – who provided fascinating interpretations regarding the names and shapes of all the letters.

Following are some examples:

“Aleph” – “Bet” – the first letters (which, incidentally, serve as the source for the world “alphabet”) stand for “Alef Binah” which is a command to learn the source of wisdom, the Torah, which is formed from all these letters. Then come “Gimmel” – “Daled” which stand for the words “Gemol Dalim” – assist the needy. But why does the foot of the Gimmel reach out towards the Daled? Because it is the caring character of the benefactor to pursue the opportunity to help the poor. And why does the roof of the Daled extend back to the Gimmel? To teach the poor man to have consideration for his benefactor and make it easy for him to reach him. And why does the Daled face away from the Gimmel? To teach the benefactor the importance of providing his assistance in a secret fashion to avoid embarrassing the recipient.

The reason such interpretations can be made, points out Maharsha, is that the letters of the Torah, in varying permutations, form the Divine Names and therefore have an innate sanctity and convey a hidden wisdom.

What the Sages Say

“One who in anger tears his clothes, smashes a vessel or tosses away his money should be viewed as if he is already an idol worshipper. For this is the strategy of the yetzer hara (evil inclination) – today he urges one to do this, tomorrow something else until he finally succeeds in getting him to worship idols.”

Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri Shabbat 105b

Ohr Somayach :: The Weekly Daf :: Shabbos 100 - 106

For the week ending 13 August 2005 / 8 Av 5765

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Write or Wrong?

Although Torah law forbids writing on Shabbos only in durable script, the Sages prohibited even such non-durable forms of writing as dipping a

finger in juice and writing letters on the table, or etching letters into dust, sand or ashes. This extends even to drawing letters on a frosted window pane, but does not include drawing imaginary letters with your finger in the air or on a dry sheet of paper.

What about etching letters into a congealed layer of fat? There is no doubt that this is forbidden since it is no less an act of writing than the aforementioned examples prohibited by rabbinic law. The question is whether such writing is forbidden even by Torah law. There is no explicit mention of such writing on congealed fat in our gemara, and one of the great halachic authorities indeed concluded that it is forbidden only by rabbinic law. But if one turns to the very last pages of a standard gemara and consults the Tosefta (a body of law citing the rulings of the Tannaic Sages not included in the Mishna and similar in many ways to the Beraisa - both of which are frequently quoted in the gemara for supporting or challenging the view of an Amoraic Sage) he will note that in Chapter 12, Tosefta 6 it is stated clearly that writing upon congealed fat is a violation of Torah law.

The logic behind the view that the ban on such writing is only of rabbinic origin is that it lacks durability since it will disappear once the fat is melted. The Tosefta’s approach, as it was understood by leading commentaries cited by Mishna Berurah (240:20), is that since such writing will last as long as no action is taken to dissolve it we must consider such writing as durable and therefore prohibited by Torah law. Shabbos 104b

Long Days and Long Years

When one Jew wishes another long life he traditionally blesses him that “Hashem should lengthen his days and years.” The reason for this apparent redundancy can be appreciated from a closer look at what the gemara tells us about the importance of properly eulogizing a deceased Torah scholar. One who is lax in eulogizing such a scholar, says Rabbi Chiya bar Abba in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, will not live long. This is a punishment of measure for measure. Since he was so indifferent to the tragedy of a scholar’s life being cut short, there will be an indifference in Heaven regarding his own life.

A challenge is presented to Rabbi Yochanan’s statement by the very same Rabbi Chiya who quoted it. The elders who survived Yeshoshua were so guilty of not properly eulogizing him that a volcano threatened to erupt and kill them (Yehoshua 24:30). Yet it is concerning these very same elders that we are told (Shoftim 2:7) “they lived long lives after the passing of Yehoshua.”

“Babylonian that you are,” Rabbi Yochanan rebuked this disciple who had left his land to learn Torah under Rabbi Yochanan in Eretz Yisrael, “they did indeed enjoy long days but they did not merit long years.” Rashi explains that “long days” refers to the quality of life, while “long years” refers to the quantity. Although their other merits gained for them an enjoyment of their years, the number of those years was lessened by their failure to adequately eulogize a Torah scholar like Yehoshua. So when we wish someone “long days and long years” we are blessing him with both quality and quantity of life. Shabbos 105b

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