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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Tu b'Av: Chessed - A Divine Boomerang
Rabbi Benjamin Yudin Rabbi Benjamin Yudin Tu b'Av: Chessed - A Divine Boomerang This Shabbos represents the resiliency of the Jewish nation. Six days ago, we sat on the floor as mourners, engulfed by despondency and despair, and today enveloped in an atmosphere of optimism. The excitement comes not only from the parsha of Vaeschanan with its many basic mitzvos of talmud Torah, tefillin, mezuzah, and the Aseres Hadibros, as well as the prohibition against intermarriage. The optimism is not only from the haftorah where the navi Yeshaya promises us that as we were persecuted most severely, so will we be comforted. The additional optimism comes from today being Tu b'Av, the fifteenth day of the month of Av. The Talmud at the end of Taanis and Bava Basra (125a-125b) enumerates six phenomena that occurred on this day that make its significance and joy comparable to that of Yom Kippur.

The last factor contributing to the uniqueness of this day is that it marked the culmination of bringing the wood for the fire on the mizbeach. The Torah (Vayikra 6:6) legislates that there is to be an aish tamid - a perpetual fire ablaze on the altar. The Talmud (Yuma 21b) informs us that in actuality there were three fires on the mizbeach: The largest one was to consume the meat sacrifices, the second largest fire was to provide the coals with which to light and offer the incense on the golden altar in the heichal, and the third one was to fulfill the Divine directive of having the perpetual fire that should not be extinguished.

There is a recurring metaphysical theme throughout many of the mitzvos according to the understanding of the Sefer HaChinuch. His basic thesis is that chesed to one's fellow man and giving to Hashem is in reality a boomerang and ultimately benefits the donor. Allow me to explain. Man, by his very nature, is limited both materialistically and spiritually. His actions

are therefore limited as well. The concept of a bracha is to break through the limits of man's actions by giving and attributing a portion to Hashem, which then limitless just like its Master is, thereby allowing bracha to settle on its object and expand limitlessly. Thus, when the Jewish nation provides the lechem hapanim weekly, fulfilling, "on the Table shall you place show-bread before Me always" (Shemos 25:30), our giving and offering Him bread allows Him to bless our bread and sustenance (see Chinuch, mitzvah97.)

Interestingly, the Chinuch (mitzvah 132), explaining the significance of our kindling a fire on the altar even though in the time of the first Beis HaMikdash fire miraculously descended from Heaven, says that man is comprised of four elements: dust, water, wind, and fire. The wood cut between Nisan and Tu b'Av is dried by the intense heat of the sun, preventing the wood from becoming wormy and thus providing the best flammable material. Once the wood has been severed, it goes from tzomeach - that which grows, to domeim - a lifeless object, and as Hashem accepts this wood and allows it to fuel the mizbeach, He then takes our domeim - lifeless element, the dust within us, and lights our fire. As the burning fire on the altar is beautiful to see and practical, so too does He take our personal fire, our drive for life, and calibrates it. Too much fire in man will consume him, anger him constantly and will not allow him to interact patiently and harmoniously with others. Too little fire will leave man without principles, without determination, a wimp. Thus our hiddur mitzvah which is accomplished by finishing this mitzvah by Tu b'Av to ensure the highest quality wood, gains us His blessings in return.

There is a moving Yalkut Shimoni at the very end of V'zos Habracha that describes Moshe leaving the mitzvah of bizuy Mitzrayim (gathering the wealth of Egypt), and for three days and three nights searching for the bones of Yosef. Pharaoh's advisors told him that if he doesn't want the Israelites to leave he should hide the bones of Yosef since they pledged not to leave without his remains, and they will surely be loyal to their pledge! Exhausted, Moshe meets Serach the daughter of Asher. Seeing Moshe totally fatigued and inquiring why, she then takes him to the shores of the Nile, where Yosef had been buried deep in the waters in a heavy casket to ensure that the Jewish nation would not leave. The rest is history. Moshe prays and Hashem delivers, but only after Moshe extends his greatest effort in this project. The lesson is clear: we have to put in our maximum effort and He will respond in kind.

In the Nachem prayer we recited on Tisha b'Av we conclude, "for You, Hashem, consumed her, and with fire You will rebuild her." I'd like to suggest that since we, the Jewish nation, took the Beis HaMikdash for granted and did not bring our fire/enthusiasm to the Beis Hamikdash, it became a lifeless shell lacking the soul and fire of the Jewish people, and therefore it was consumed with natural fire. We pray that in the near future, in the merit of our studying and appreciating the korban eitzim (the wood donations) and our pining and longing to fulfill this mitzvah as well as all other mitzvos related to the Beis HaMikdash, this fire and enthusiasm will speedily cause the rebuilding of the third Beis HaMikdash in our days.

More divrei Torah and shiurim from Rabbi Yudin

More divrei Torah on Parshas Vaeschanan

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Making Love Last

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Over the past few months I've been having conversations with leading thinkers, intellectuals, innovators and philanthropists for a BBC series on moral challenges of the 21st century. Among those I spoke to was David Brooks, one of the most insightful moralists of our time. His conversation is always scintillating, but one remark of his was particularly beautiful. It is a key that helps us unlock the entire project outlined by Moses in Sefer Devarim, the fifth and final book of the Torah. We had been talking about

covenants and commitments. I suggested that many people in the West today are commitment-averse, reluctant to bind themselves unconditionally and open-endedly to something or someone. The market mindset that predominates today encourages us to try this, sample that, experiment and keep our options open for the latest version or the better deal. Pledges of loyalty are few and far between.

Brooks agreed and noted that nowadays freedom is usually understood as freedom-from, meaning the absence of restraint. We don't like to be tied down. But the real freedom worth having, in his view, is freedom-to, meaning the ability to do something that's difficult and requires effort and expertise.[1] So, for example, if you want to have the freedom to play the piano, you have to chain yourself to it and practise every day.

Freedom in this sense does not mean the absence of restraint, but rather, choosing the right restraint. That involves commitment, which involves a choice to forego certain choices. Then he said: "My favourite definition of commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it for the moment when love falters."

That struck me as a beautiful way into one of the fundamental features of Sefer Devarim specifically, and Judaism generally. The book of Deuteronomy is more than simply Moses' speeches in the last months of his life, his tzava'ah or ethical will to the future generations. It is more, also, than Mishneh Torah,[2] a recapitulation of the rest of the Torah, a restatement of the laws and history of the people since their time in Egypt.

It is a fundamental theological statement of what Judaism is about. It is an attempt to integrate law and narrative into a single coherent vision of what it would be like to create a society of law-governed liberty under the sovereignty of God: a society of justice, compassion, respect for human dignity and the sanctity of human life. And it is built around an act of mutual commitment, by God to a people and by the people to God.

The commitment itself is an act of love. At the heart of it are the famous words from the Shema in this week's parsha: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). The Torah is the foundational narrative of the fraught, sometimes tempestuous, marriage between God and an often obstinate people. It is a story of love.

We can see how central love is to the book of Deuteronomy by noting how often the root a-h-v, "to love," appears in each of the five books of the Torah. It occurs 15 times in Genesis, but none of these is about the relationship between God and a human being. They are about the feelings of husbands for wives or parents for children. This is how often the verb appears in the other 4 books:

Exodus 2 Leviticus 2 Numbers Deuteronomy 23

Again and again we hear of love, in both directions, from the Israelites to God and from God to the Israelites. It is the latter that are particularly striking. Here are some examples:

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you ... (Deut. 7:7-8)

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set His affection on your ancestors and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. (Deut. 10:14-15)

The Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. (Deut 23:5)

The real question is how this vision is connected to the legal, halakhic content of much of Devarim. On the one hand we have this passionate declaration of love by God for a people; on the other we have a detailed code of law covering most aspects of life for individuals and the nation as a whole once it enters the land. Law and love are not two things that go obviously together. What has the one to do with the other?

That is what David Brooks' remark suggests: commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behaviour around it to

sustain that love over time. Law, the mitzvoth, halakhah, is that structure of behaviour. Love is a passion, an emotion, a heightened state, a peak experience. But an emotional state cannot be guaranteed forever. We wed in poetry but we stay married in prose.

Which is why we need laws, rituals, habits of deed. Rituals are the framework that keeps love alive. I once knew a wonderfully happy married couple. The husband, with great devotion, brought his wife breakfast in bed every morning. I am not entirely sure she needed or even wanted breakfast in bed every morning, but she graciously accepted it because she knew it was the homage he wished to pay her, and it did indeed keep their love alive. After decades of marriage, they still seemed to be on their honeymoon.

Without intending any precise comparison, that is what the vast multiplicity of rituals in Judaism, many of them spelled out in the book of Deuteronomy, actually achieved. They sustained the love between God and a people. You hear the cadences of that love throughout the generations. It is there in the book of Psalms: "You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1). It is there in Isaiah: "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed" (Is. 54:10). It is there in the siddur, in the blessing before the Shema: "You have loved us with great love / with everlasting love." It is there, passionately, in the song, Yedid Nefesh, composed in the sixteenth century by Safed kabbalist Elazar Azikri. It remains there in the songs composed year after year in present-day Israel. Whether they speak of God's love for us or ours for Him, the love remains strong after 33 centuries. That is a long time for love to last, and we believe it will do so forever.

Could it have done so without the rituals, the 613 commands, that fill our days with reminders of God's presence? I think not. Whenever Jews abandoned the life of the commands, within a few generations they lost their identity. Without the rituals, eventually love dies. With them, the glowing embers remain, and still have the power to burst into flame. Not every day in a long and happy marriage feels like a wedding, but even love grown old will still be strong, if the choreography of fond devotion, the ritual courtesies and kindnesses, are sustained.

In the vast literature of halakhah we find the 'how' and 'what' of Jewish life, but not always the 'why.' The special place of Sefer Devarim in Judaism as a whole is that here, more clearly than almost anywhere else, we find the 'why.' Jewish law is the structure of behaviour built around the love between God and His people, so that the love remains long after the first feelings of passion have grown old.

Hence the life-change idea: if you seek to make love undying, build around it a structure of rituals – small acts of kindness, little gestures of self-sacrifice for the sake of the beloved – and you will be rewarded with a quiet joy, an inner light, that will last a lifetime.

[1] This is similar to, though not identical with, Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive freedom, in his famous essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' reprinted in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, Oxford University Press, 2002, 166-217. [2] This was the original rabbinical name for the book. The name Deuteronomy, from the Latin meaning "second law," was an attempt to capture the sense of the book as a restatement of the laws.

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The Meaning of Tu B'Av

Aug 13, 2005

by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau

The Mishnah tells us that: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." (Tractate Ta'anit) What is Tu B'Av, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Av? In which way is it equivalent to Yom Kippur?

Our Sages explain: Yom Kippur symbolizes God's forgiving Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf in the desert, for it was on that day that He finally

accepted Moses' plea for forgiveness of the nation, and on that same day Moses came down from the mountain with the new set of tablets.

Just as Yom Kippur symbolizes the atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, Tu B'Av signifies the atonement for the sin of the Spies, where ten came bearing such negative reports which reduced the entire nation to panic. As a result of that sin, it was decreed by God that the nation would remain in the desert for 40 years, and that no person 20 or older would be allowed to enter Israel. On each Tisha B'Av of those 40 years, those who had reached the age of 60 that year died – 15,000 each Tisha B'Av.

This plague finally ended on Tu B'Av.

Six positive events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Event #1 - As noted above, the plague that had accompanied the Jews in the desert for 40 years ended. That last year, the last 15,000 people got ready to die. God, in His mercy, decided not to have that last group die, considering all the troubles they had gone through. Now, when the ninth of Av approached, all the members of the group got ready to die, but nothing happened. They then decided that they might have been wrong about the date, so they waited another day, and another...

Finally on the 15th of Av, when the full moon appeared, they realized definitely that the ninth of Av had come and gone, and that they were still alive. Then it was clear to them that God's decree was over, and that He had finally forgiven the people for the sin of the Spies.

This is what was meant by our Sages when they said: "No days were as festive for Israel as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur," for there is no greater joy than having one's sins forgiven – on Yom Kippur for the sin of the Golden Calf and on Tu B'Av for the sin of the spies. In the Book of Judges, Tu B'Av is referred to as a holiday (Judges 21:19).

In addition to this noteworthy event, five other events occurred on Tu B'Av:

Events #2 and 3 - Following the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (see Numbers, chapter 36), daughters who inherited from their father when there were no sons were forbidden to marry someone from a different tribe, so that land would not pass from one tribe to another. Generations later, after the story of the "Concubine of Giv'ah" (see Judges, chapters 19-21), the Children of Israel swore not to allow their daughters to marry anyone from the tribe of Benjamin. This posed a threat of annihilation to the tribe of Benjamin.

Each of these prohibitions were lifted on Tu B'Av. The people realized that if they kept to their prohibition, one of the 12 tribes might totally disappear. As to the oath that had been sworn, they pointed out that it only affected the generation that had taken the oath, and not subsequent generations. The same was applied to the prohibition of heiresses marrying outside their own tribe: this rule was applied only to the generation that had conquered and divided up the land under Joshua, but not future generations. This was the first expression of the merging of all the tribes, and was a cause for rejoicing. In the Book of Judges it is referred to as "a festival to the Lord."

Over the generations, this day was described in Tractate Ta'anit as a day devoted to betrothals, so that new Jewish families would emerge.

Event #4 - After Jeroboam split off the kingdom of Israel with its ten tribes from the kingdom of Judea, he posted guards along all the roads leading to Jerusalem, to prevent his people from going up to the Holy City for the pilgrimage festivals, for he feared that such pilgrimages might undermine his authority. As a "substitute," he set up places of worship which were purely idolatrous, in Dan and Beth-el. Thus the division between the two kingdoms became a fait accompli and lasted for generations.

The last king of the kingdom of Israel, Hosea ben Elah, wished to heal the breach, and removed all the guards from the roads leading to Jerusalem, thus allowing his people to make the pilgrimage again. This act took place on Tu B'Av.

Event #5 - At the beginning of the Second Temple period, the Land of Israel lay almost totally waste, and the wood needed to burn the sacrifices and for the eternal flame that had to burn on the altar was almost impossible

to obtain. Each year a number of brave people volunteered to bring the wood needed from afar – a trip which was dangerous in the extreme.

Now, not just every wood could be brought. Wood which was wormy was not permitted. And dampness and cold are ideal conditions for the breeding of worms in wood. As a result, all the wood that would be needed until the following summer had to be collected before the cold set in. The last day that wood was brought in for storage over the winter months was Tu B'Av, and it was a festive occasion each year when the quota needed was filled by that day.

Event #6 - Long after the event, the Romans finally permitted the bodies of those who had been killed in the defense of Betar (in the Bar Kochba revolt) to be buried. This was a double miracle, in that, first, the Romans finally gave permission for the burial, and, second, in spite of the long period of time that had elapsed, the bodies had not decomposed. The permission was granted on Tu B'Av.

In gratitude for this double miracle, the fourth and last blessing of the Grace After Meals was added, which thanks God as "He Who is good and does good." "He is good" – in that the bodies had not decomposed, "and does good" – in that permission was given for the burial.

To this day, we celebrate Tu B'Av as a minor festival. We do not say Tahanun on that day, nor are eulogies rendered. By the same token, if a couple are getting married on that day (and, as we will see below, it is the custom for the bride and groom to fast on their wedding day), neither fasts.

Beginning with Tu B'Av, we start preparing ourselves spiritually for the month of Elul, the prologue to the coming Days of Awe. The days begin to get shorter, the nights get longer. The weather, too, helps us to take spiritual stock: the hectic days of the harvest are over for the farmer, and the pace has slowed down considerably. Even on a physical level, the heat of the summer makes it hard to sit down and think things out, and now that the days and nights are cooler, it is easier to examine one's actions.

In earlier times, it was the custom already from Tu B'Av to use as one's greeting "May your inscription and seal be for good" (ketiva vahatima tova), the same blessing that we today use on Rosh Hashana. Those who work out the gematria values of different expressions found that phrase adds up to 928 – and so does the words for "15th of Av."

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About the Author

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Va'etchanan: Cleaving to God

"You, who remained attached to the Lord your God, are all alive today." (Deut. 4:4) What does it mean "to be attached to God"? As the Talmud (Sotah 14a) asks, is it possible to cleave to the Shechinah, God's Divine Presence, which the Torah (Deut. 4:24) describes as a "consuming fire"?

The Sages answered:

"Rather, this means you should cleave to God's attributes. Just as God clothed the naked [Adam and Eve], so too you should cloth the naked. Just as God visited the sick [Abraham after his circumcision], so too you should visit the sick. Just as God consoled the mourners [Isaac after Abraham's death], so too you should console the mourners. Just as God buried the

dead [Moses], so too you should bury the dead.” This explanation on how one may cleave to God is the very essence of the Kabbalistic study of the sephirot. What is the point in studying the intricacies of God’s Names and His manifestations in holy sephirot? We learn about God’s divine attributes so that we may aspire to imitate them. These studies enable us to follow in God’s ways and in this way cleave to Him.

This idea - that we can only attach ourselves to God by imitating His attributes - is a fundamental concept in Judaism. Any other understanding of cleaving to God implies some degree of anthropomorphism or idolatry.

The very existence of ideals, holy aspirations, and ethics in the world and in the human soul mandates the existence of a Divine Source. From where else could they come? Our awareness of the Source of these ideals elevates them, revealing new wellsprings of light and pure life.

(Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 297-298. Adapted from Musar Avicha, pp. 118-119)

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum on Kriyas Shma

Va’ani Tefillah Bereishis 5774 V’Shinantam levanecha. Teach them thoroughly to your children. V’Shinantam levanecha literally means “and sharpen them,” which Chazal explain to mean. “The words of Torah are to be sharply expressed by your mouth.” The Torah’s teachings should be taught in a sharp, precise, cutting edge manner, so that the student will have a clear and concise understanding of the subject matter. If Torah is not clearly understood, one will be unable to respond to halachic questions. Additionally, if the Torah is not understood well, mistakes in both halachah and hashkafah, philosophic rendering, may occur. All too often we come upon a person whose background and appreciation of Torah is weak and misguided due to his teacher’s inability to convey the lesson properly. More often than not, this is because of the teacher’s superficial knowledge of the subject matter. One cannot emphasize enough the need to have a clear understanding of Torah. To quote Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, “As long as a person has not merited absorbing the Torah’s wisdom, as long as he does not view the world through a lens of Torah values, he is utterly incapable of grasping the meaning, not only of world events, but even of his own experiences.”

Va’ani Tefillah Noach 5774 V’Shinantam levanechah - teach them thoroughly to your children. In an alternative interpretation of this pasuk, Chazal say, “Do not read, it v’shinantam, but, v’shilastem.” V’shinantam would be derived from shnei/shnayim, two, while v’shilastem is a derivative of shlishi, three. Chazal are teaching us that a teacher should personally study the subject matter three times. He must have himself learned it twice in order to absorb and retain the lesson. The third time is when he teaches it to the student. The word shinun, which means study, is derived from shnayim, two, or to repeat. The Talmud Eiruvim 54b compares the learning of something only one time to a hunter who has captured a bird and, although not rendering it unfit to fly away, expects it to stay with him. When one repeats his studies, he retains it; otherwise, it will “fly” away. V’dibarta bam - and speak of them. The Torah seems to be presenting us with two criteria for teaching Torah. Shanein/v’sheanantem means to teach the subject matter by means of terse, forceful and easy to-be-remembered statements. V’dibarta bam implies to talk of them, explain them, elucidate them. Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, observes that, by combining these two approaches, we can readily discern the correct manner for disseminating Torah to our children/students. First, teach it in the form of brief, concise statements. Then, impress them upon this memory by more detailed comment and discussion. This means that they must be taught Torah She’B’Ksav and Torah She’Ba’al Peh.

Va’ani Tefillah Lech 5774 V’shinantam levanecha v’dibarta bam. And teach them thoroughly to your children and speak of them. The command to teach Torah to our children is the direct result of our love of Torah. When one loves something and considers it precious, he wants to share it with his children. One wants to bestow good on his children, and there is no greater good than Torah. By means of constant teaching, we demonstrate to our children the esteem in which we hold divrei Torah, thus bringing them to also love Torah and the One Who commanded it. V’shinantam can have two meanings: v’shinantam - the words of Torah shall be sharp in your mouth; Shinun also means repetition. We have sharpness and repetition. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, posits that both of these meanings are connected. The sharpness of arrows and knives is achieved by repeated application to the whetstone. Likewise, sharpness of acumen is realized by constant repetition and diligent study. This is imperative in the exhortation lilmud u’lelameid, lishmor, “To learn and to teach, to guard.” To guard means to review constantly: 1) in order not to forget; 2) and not to permit the impression on the mind to wane.

Va’ani Tefillah Vayeira 5774 b’shivtecha b’veisecha u’v’lechtech va’derech u’b’ shachbecha u’b’kumecha. When you sit in your house, and when you walk on the road;

when you lie down, and when you arise. The necessity to make Torah an essential part of our everyday endeavor is herein underscored. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains the above four circumstances from a practical point of view. When one sits in his home, comfortably surrounded by all of its conveniences, recreational and relaxational appliances, he is apt to place Hashem on the “back burner.” The Almighty will not be his priority. Thus, he is reminded that the home is also a place for speaking Torah. The other extreme is the road trip which exerts and raises one’s anxiety level.

Inconvenienced by the presence of strangers, sleeping in strange beds, living out of a suitcase, one might be prone to relax or even forget about Hashem. The Torah reminds him that a Jew may never forget, may never let his guard down. The second set of circumstances involves the spirit - or emotional aspect - of a person. When one lies down, weary and dispirited, he has no desire to do anything but rest and forget about his responsibilities. This idea applies equally to the twilight of one’s years, when in our senior years we tend to say, “Who cares?” We are hereby admonished that one who truly loves Hashem never rests from repeating His words. Likewise, when one arises in the morning full of pep and vigor, he is occupied with goals and aspirations for taking on the world and tackling all of its problems, as well as his own. He is so busy with his personal ambitions that he might forget Hashem. This applies also to the morning of one’s life, in his youth, when he is so filled with life and material pursuits that the spirit is placed as a far second to everything else. He is hereby reminded that one must always repeat Hashem’s words.

Va’ani Tefillah Chayei 5774 V’dibarta bam. And speak of them. Rashi quotes the Sifri that interprets this phrase: Shelo yehei ikar diburcha ela bam. Aseim ikar v’al taaseim tafel. “Your primary conversation shall be about Torah and mitzvos. Make them primary; do not make them secondary.” Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, quotes Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, who finds in this Sifri a source for the teaching of secular subjects, as long as the Torah remains primary and of utmost significance - with the secular subjects remaining secondary to it. If secular subjects were to be totally excluded from the Jewish curriculum of study, Chazal would have said something to the effect that, v’dibarta bam - shelo yehei diburcha ela bam, “Your conversation should be only in them.” Since exclusiveness is not granted to Torah study - only primary significance, it implies that, for certain purposes, secular studies are permitted. I am not sure what the proof is. Chazal are speaking about conversation - not necessarily study. One is certainly permitted to converse, maintain a dialogue in areas that are not exclusively Torah, as long as Torah is the ikar, primary. Setting time aside for secular study at the expense of Torah might be another question altogether, to which Chazal might not be alluding.

Va’ani Tefillah Toldos 5774 V’Shinantam levanecha. Teach them thoroughly to your children. In the Talmud Kiddushin 30a, Chazal interpret v’shinantam as being derived from shinun, sharp. They teach that the words of the Torah are to be sharply expressed by your mouth. The idea is that Torah should be rendered in a sharp, precise, clear and concise manner, so that the student will be able to grasp the material more quickly and retain it longer. Chazal quote a pasuk from Mishlei 7:4, emor lachochmah achosi at, “Say to wisdom, you are my sister.” This demonstrates the close relationship one must develop with Torah wisdom. He should be as comfortable with it - as he is with family. Horav Yehudah Leib Fine, zl, Rav of Slonim, questions the use of a “sister” to describe the filial relationship, rather than a “brother.” He offers the following explanation. In the Talmud Bava Basra 139b, Chazal state the following law of inheritance. If the deceased was poor and left over a few material possessions, his daughters are supported from whatever is left over by the father, while the sons are relegated to live off the dole or to go begging from door to door. The bottom line is that the daughters are provided for, while the sons must provide for themselves. Let us apply this halachah to contemporary society, during which the economic toll has weighed heavily on many of us. One might think, “I do not have the time to pursue Torah studies. I devote every available minute to eking out a living. I surely do not have anything extra with which to support others.” To him we reply, “Shlomo Hamelech has already established that the wisdom of Torah is compared to one’s sister. Thus, the Torah is to be sustained by the material possessions that one has. The Torah is not to be sent begging from door to door.” We make time for Torah study; and we provide for Torah scholars. They are first and foremost.

Va’ani Tefillah Vayetze 5774 V’shinantam v’vanecha v’dibarta bam. V’hayu ha’devarim ha’eilah, “And these words shall be” - “These words” are a reference to the pesukim of Shema and V’ahavta. The mandate of Shema is to be part of our life, “when you lie down and when you arise” - from the minute we wake up, throughout the entire day, until we retire to bed, the implications of Shema are to be engraved in our heart and mind. Moreover, we should teach it well to our children, so that they are proficient in its message. This is best achieved if we speak about it always. Children learn from the standards set for them by their parents. The message of Shema includes the imperative that one give up his freedom of choice, his life, and all of his material possessions in the pursuit of loving G-d. We must promote Kiddush Shem Shomayim, Sanctification of Hashem’s Name in the world; it should be our primary task and focus

in life. It is not enough to believe it and even live it, if we are not able to transmit these verities to our children. We must talk about this to them and imbue them with the notion that living for Hashem is the only way to live and it is the only meaning of life. Life is defined by our connection. The closer we get, the more committed, the greater we enhance our lives.

Va'ani Tefillah Vayishlach 5774 U'keshartam l'os yadecha. And you shall bind them on your hands. In Sefer Shemos (13:16), the Torah elaborates on the mitzvah of Tefillin shel yad, the Tefillin worn on the arm: "It shall be a sign on your hand... that with strength of hand Hashem took you out of Egypt." Also, it is written (ibid 13:9), "It shall be a sign on your hand... in order that the Torah of Hashem be in your mouth." Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains that these two signs are actually one. Hashem took us out of Egypt, not simply because He did not want us to be subjected to slavery, but because He wanted us to be His nation. Entrance into the Jewish nation is based upon acceptance of Hashem's Torah. He took us out of Egypt so that we would study His Torah. It really is as simple as that. Rav Miller adds that the sign on the arm is a sign of love. He quotes the pasuk in Shir HaShirim (8:6), "Put me as a sign upon your heart, as a sign upon your arm; for love is as strong as death." The Tefillin on the arm is opposite the heart, as a sign of Hashem's everlasting love for us and our love for Him. It also serves as a reminder, so that whenever we do something with our arms, we thereby become aware of the Tefillin. Last, I think we are compelled to keep in our mind the fact that something as holy as Tefillin is placed on our arms, thus making them a repository of holiness. We will, therefore, think twice when we do something with our arms. All we have to imagine is having a Sefer Torah tied onto our arms.

Va'ani Tefillah Vayeshev 5774 U'keshartem l'os al yadecha. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand. The Tefillin shel yad must be bound upon the muscle of the upper arm, opposite the heart. The Torah, however, writes that it should be bound al yadecha, "upon your hand." Chazal teach us that "hand" should be interpreted as "arm." In the Yehi ratzon prayer which many recite prior to putting on Tefillin, we say, "And You commanded us to place (the Tefillin) on the zeroa (upper part of the arm) to remind us of (Hashem's) zeroa ha'netuyah, Outstretched Arm" (which was evidenced during yetzias Mitzrayim, the Egyptian exodus). Furthermore, we state that, "it is k'neged ha'lev., opposite the heart," (so that) this helps us to control the urges and instincts of our heart for the special purpose of serving Hashem." What is the connection between the human biceps and the Outstretched Arm of Hashem, which is a metaphor for His awesome power over the forces of nature? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that Hashem has given us a zeroa netuyah, as well. Thus, just as He exerts control over nature, so, too, has He granted us the power and ability to subjugate and control our own nature, our passions, emotions, desires. It is all up to us. This is what is meant by having the Tefillin shel yad k'neged ha'lev opposite the heart. When we place the Tefillin on the muscle of the arm, situated opposite the heart, we are making a powerful statement. The arm controls the movement of our hand. We are thereby declaring that we have it within ourselves to control the destiny of our activities. Thus, we say the words al yadecha, which refer to the hand, although it is upon the arm that we place the Tefillin. The primary lesson of the Tefillin shel yad is for us to use the power within us to control our "hands" - our activities.

Va'ani Tefillah Miketz 5774 V'hayu l'tofos bein einecha. And let them be tofos/Tefillin between your eyes. In the Talmud Menachos 34b, Tosfos comments that tofos are explained as head-gear or a crown which identifies it as something to be worn on the head. They are to be worn in the center of the front of the head, "between the eyes." This area is called the fontanelle, the membrane over the hollow between the bones of the skull of a young infant. These bones eventually fuse together a few months after birth. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, observes that one can feel the pulse of an infant by placing a finger upon the fontanelle. A profound symbolism is to be understood herein. Our "crown" is our bechirah, ability to choose a way of life that is moral, ethical and true to Hashem. It is interesting to note that, in order to wear the Tefillin properly, one must rely on the interpretation of Chazal. For example, the Torah writes, "bind the Tefillin on the hand." Chazal interpret "hand" as forearm. The Torah instructs us to place the Tefillin Shel Rosh "between the eyes," which is interpreted as on the forehead. This teaches us that, in all areas of life, just as our daily activities and actions are symbolized by the hand, and in all of our intellectual thought, represented by the head, everything must be determined and guided by the Torah, as interpreted by Chazal. Without the Oral Law, the Written Law remains a closed book.

Va'ani Tefillah Vayigash 5774 The Tefillin contain four parshios within them. They are V'hayah ki yeviacha; Kadeish Li kol b'chor - V'haya im shamo; Shema Yisrael. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains the significance of these parshios as two sets, each set focusing on a distinct area. The first two parshios refer to the guf, human body, thus connoting its holiness. This is why we have many mitzvos which pertain to the body, laws which regulate what we may ingest, what we may wear, what we should eat, etc. As a result of our body's kedushah, holiness, it retains an element of sanctity even after the soul has left it; thus it must be treated as a davar she'b'kedusah, holy object. The

other two parshios address kabbolas ol malchus Shomayim, accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven upon us. They correspond to the sanctity of our neshamah, soul, spiritual dimension. When we wear both Tefillin, there is a confluence of guf/nefesh - ruach/neshamah, all of our physical aspects with those of the spirit. We are, thus, intimating that we bind both body and soul to the will of Hashem. While this may not run through our minds on a daily basis, due to the rush of life - perhaps it should. The idea of being surrounded by mitzvos, enconced in carrying out the will of G-d, applies to women as well - although they do not have the mitzvah of Tefillin. Rav Schwab explains that in the absence of the mitzvah of Tefillin, women's use of the mikveh replaces this feeling. By immersing herself in the water, a woman is surrounded by the mitzvah, thereby expressing the dedication of her guf and neshamah to the execution of the will of Hashem.

Va'ani Tefillah Vayechi 5774 The Talmud Berachos 14b states, "Whoever recites Krias Shema without (wearing) Tefillin is considered as if he is testifying falsely about himself." Simply, this is because he is saying that one should "bind (these words) on your hand, and they should be for tofos (crown) between your eyes;" while he is presently reciting the Shema, he has neither Tefillin on his arm or head. In an alternative statement, Chazal compare one who recites Shema without Tefillin to one who offers up a Korban Olah, Burnt-offering, or Minchah, Meal-offering, without the accompaniment of the necessary Nesachim, Libations. At first glance, both analogies posit that Shema without Tefillin is incomplete and, thus, not acceptable, similar to false testimony or incomplete sacrificial offerings. In his Baruch She'amar, Horav Baruch Epstein, zl, suggests that a fundamental difference exists between these two comparisons. If we compare Krias Shema without Tefillin to one who testifies falsely, the individual no longer has a way to repair his wrong. Reciting Krias Shema again with Tefillin is of no consequence, since we say Kivan she'higid, shuv eino chozeir u'magid, "Once one has testified, he cannot reiterate his testimony." It is over and done with. On the other hand, one who did not pour the Nesachim at the time the Korban was sacrificed may do so later; similarly, he could don Tefillin later and repeat Krias Shema.

Va'ani Tefillah Shmos 5774 ...and write on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates. We take the mezuzah affixed to our doorstep for granted. For those of us who make the effort to kiss it, it is often expeditiously, without much forethought or intent. It is just something which we are used to doing. The other day, while speaking to someone who was about to have a mezuzah affixed to his office door for the very first time, he asked me to explain the exact significance of having a mezuzah on one's doorstep. First, it is a mitzvah. This alone lends it significance. As for reasons, I told him the following: the mezuzah is a sign on the house which declares that the house and everything therein belongs to Hashem. They all are dedicated to Him in such a way that is pleasing to Him. It is our way of saying, "Thank you," to Hashem. Indeed, it is very much like the brachah, blessing, we make over food. Without acknowledging and thanking Hashem for the food, we hardly have the right to partake of it. Next, whenever we enter or leave the house, we are reminded that we are Jews and that wherever we may be, whether at home or at work, we must live up to the ideals and values which set Judaism apart from the rest of the world's religions. Last, the mezuzah protects the home. With its parchment containing the sacred words of the Shema, it serves as the ever-watchful and faithful guardian of the Jewish home, blessing it with health, harmony and happiness.

Va'ani Tefillah Vaeira 5774 The mitzvos of Tefillin and Mezuzah are included among those mitzvos which are called Edos, Testimonial mitzvos, which attest to our relationship with Hashem and His relationship with us. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, observes that these Edos mitzvos become effective only when duly activated. Much like anything else, for example, a credit card, unless one calls the bank and activates the card, is nothing more than a piece of plastic. When one connects with the bank, the "plastic" takes on substantial value, commensurate with the signee's credit limit. Thus, by identifying Tefillin and Mezuzah with the general mitzvah of Torah study, eventually the Tefillin and Mezuzah would keep the words of the Torah constantly in one's mouth by reminding him to love Hashem. Originally, Tefillin were meant for all-day wear; they were to be part of the uniform of a Jew. Thus, they, together with the Mezuzah, would stand guard over the Jew - protecting him from sin. As he gazes upon the Mezuzah and as he wears the Tefillin, he is reminded of his obligations; thus, Hashem assists him, so that he benefits from these Edos mitzvos. Reminders are only effective when activated. Walking through a door and tapping the Mezuzah becomes a thoughtless habit, whose true purpose is largely thwarted when one's mind is not put into motion. Without the brain's engagement, there is no testimony, no reminder.

Va'ani Tefillah Bo 5774 Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, cites a remarkable statement made by the Rambam at the end of Hilchos Mezuzah: "Every time, when he comes and goes, he should be aware of the existence of the One G-d and remember his Love of G-d; and this will awaken him from his 'sleep' and his erroneous way in his fleeting life." A number of observations may be noted. First, we see that most people are not "fully awake." As a result of this spiritual slumber, one walks around and ignores the more

important things in this world. He just passes by without giving them a second thought. When one passes a mezuzah, it should remind him of Hashem, wake him up to realize that there is a Creator Who sees it all, everything that he is - or is not - doing. This wake-up call will/should motivate him to mend the error of his ways and get with the program. This world is our temporary abode, a mere preparation for the real world which we hope that we will be worthy of entering. If we sleep through life, we will have great difficulty obtaining an entrance visa. The Rambam continues: "When he passes the mezuzah, he should remind himself that nothing is permanent except the knowledge of Hashem." This means both His knowledge of us and our knowledge of Him, if we connect with Him. Everything comes to an end. All physical/material objects eventually cease to exist. The only way that we, as human beings, are able to immortalize ourselves is to connect with Hashem through Torah and mitzvos. Mortality is, of course, finite; Hashem is infinite. We must bond with the Divine in order to transcend our finiteness. The mezuzah on the doorpost witnesses a person's comings and goings. Everything in life changes; thus, one day there will no longer be a house or a person. The only thing that does not ever change is Hashem's Oneness - Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad. When one leaves the house, looks up at the mezuzah, he reminds himself of Hashem's permanence, of his own mortality. He acknowledges that this might even be the last time that he will walk out of this house. It might all come to an end - suddenly, without warning. This will generate a wake-up call in his mind. He will begin to think that perhaps it might be a cogent idea to set his life straight, correct his ways, get his spiritual act together. The mezuzah's message is poignant and compelling: One's house and one's material possessions are fleeting. The only real permanence is the awareness and reality of Hashem.

Va'ani Tefillah Beshalach 5774 The mitzvah of Tefillin and Mezuzah, as well as V'shinantam levanecha, the mitzvah of limud haTorah, are included in the first parsha of Krias Shema. Chazal considered these mitzvos to be absolutely vital to the very existence of our individual and national life. Chazal relate various episodes which depict the mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, the Jewish People were prepared to undergo, in order to observe these mitzvos. The lesson which I personally derive from this is that these mitzvos are vital to us, because each mitzvah protects us in a descending manner. Let me explain: Torah is our life, and, thus, when we are suffused in its profundities, we are sort of concealed behind, and within, a protective barrier. The Tefillin are less of a protector, but no less, give refuge to the Jewish soul. When one wears Tefillin, he is ensconced in Hashem's protection. This might not be as powerful as being suffused in the Torah, but the connection is quite apparent. Last, is the mezuzah, which, although one does not wear it, when he raises his hand and touches it, he indicates his inseparable bond with the mezuzah's message. There is the Jew who lives within the Torah, suffused in its profundities. There is another who is not as involved, but at least he dresses the part and remains within the environment of an observant milieu. Last, is the Jew who is out in the world, whose lifestyle and dress code leaves much to be desired - but his connection to Yiddishkeit is warm. He keeps his hand on the mezuzah, never forgetting the Source of his existence.

Va'ani Tefillah Yisro 5774 V'hayah im shamoa tishme'u el mitzvosai The Talmud Berachos 13a makes the following statement, which I feel is central to our concept of mitzvah performance, especially in the area of Jewish outreach. Amar Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha. Why does Parashas Shema (the first parsha of Krias Shema) precede the (second) parsha, V'hayah im shamoa? It is to encourage one to accept upon himself the yoke of G-d's reign before accepting the yoke of mitzvos. In Parashas Shema, we accept the ol malchus Shomayim, the yoke of the rule of Heaven, over ourselves. This is a prerequisite to the parsha, V'hayah im shamoa, in which we assume upon ourselves the yoke of mitzvah performance. Carrying out mitzvos can, at times, be difficult. Thus, Chazal have characterized its performance with the terminology of "yoke." We derive one important principle from Chazal: Mitzvah performance is not exclusive of recognizing that Hashem is in control and that He reigns supreme in all areas of human endeavor. Becoming a Torah observant Jew does not occur because one simply performs mitzvos. If he does not acknowledge the Heaven-factor - the mitzvos are wonderful practices, but they remain practices. A mitzvah is an endeavor carried out l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. In order to do this, one must recognize that there is a Heaven. Otherwise, for whom is he performing the mitzvah?

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Derech Hashem: The Body and The Soul Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by **Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller**

The body and soul experience two phases, a time for work, struggle, integration, and becoming, and a time for reward. In the first stage there's

absolute balance, the body and soul have equal power which creates free choice. In the second stage, the soul works to elevate the body. According to the amount of effort one invested to strengthen one's soul in this world, that is how strong it will become in the next world. A strong soul can give illumination to the body and purify it and draw it closer to Hashem and to His light.

In this world, we cannot separate body and soul. It's like kneaded dough. After death the two split apart and become separate entities. This must take place for a time before they are reunited again. The body disintegrates and returns to the earth from which it came. The soul cannot yet return to the body because it hasn't yet reached its perfect state to be able to purify it. It returns to the world of souls. It's impossible to totally separate the body and soul. Whatever side was stronger in life is the one the person will identify with more. For a person who totally identified with his body, the stage when the body decomposes is exquisitely painful. Not just because of the physical phenomena of worms dissecting one's body, but because of the attachment the person felt for his body which is now turning to earth. A person whose real self was his soul transcends this painful process. During the time that the soul is waiting for the world to be renewed it experiences pleasure according to the level it attained in this world. It will however not experience full reward until the revival of the dead.

It is very difficult to crack open a peach pit. But if you put it in the ground, the biological composition of the earth will soften it until it releases enzymes that eat away at its glue until it decomposes, and a new tree grows out. We call this nature, but it's only natural because we see it all the time. If we think about the intricacy and wisdom involved in the growth of each peach tree we would be forced to see Hashem there. Similarly, the course of nature dictates that the human body will decompose. Yet the same force of life that makes a peach grow remains within the person even after death. Thinking about this makes the concept of the revival of the dead more understandable.

It was decreed that a person cannot become whole except through death. The soul loses the opportunity to do more after death, but since it doesn't have the body holding it down anymore, it becomes clearer and more aware and less given to mistakes. In this world the soul isn't fully cognizant of what it wants as a part of the body still functions within it. When the body disintegrates and submits, the soul can finally achieve a much higher level of affecting the body. All of nature desires to do Hashem's will. There are no birds that choose not to fly. Similarly the soul wants to achieve tikun. Its happiness will only be complete when it returns to the body. Likewise, the body was made for wholeness and cannot be complete until the soul redefines it. In the world of the souls, the soul radiates and becomes stronger according to its deeds so that when it returns to the body, it will be able to achieve what it was destined to do. This is the happy ending we are all yearning for, a perfected soul working in concert with a perfected body.

G-d as a Role Model Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by **Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen**

The Sefer Tomer Devora discusses the attribute of V'tashlich b'metzulat yom kol chatosom. He begins with a question asked by many Rishonim. Why was Pharaoh punished if whatever suffering Klal Yisrael endured was the fault of their sins? Likewise, the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva asks, why were the Egyptians punished if it was already decreed in heaven that the Jews would need to endure the suffering of exile. The Rambam answers, although it was in fact a decree it doesn't mean every Egyptian had to carry it out. In addition, they went above and beyond what was decreed. Therefore they were punished. The Meshech Chochma says, the Egyptians should've felt indebted to the Jews. Instead they repaid them with evil. They tortured them not because they wanted to carry out Hashem's command, but out of a personal inner hatred. They went above and beyond the decree of hard labor. They took little children and threw them in the river and used them for bricks. That is why they were punished.

This question is also raised by the Tomer Devora. It says in Mishlei, "A tzadik is redeemed from his grief while the rasha endures his punishment." All the pain that the tzadik should have received is transferred over to the rasha. This is the meaning of "V'tashlich b'metzulot yam" After Klal Yisrael did teshuva, their punishment was passed over to the resha'im among them Pharaoh, Sancheiriv, and Haman.

Teshuva on Yom Kippur can erase sin but it's not uprooted entirely. The punishment still remains. Teshuva transfers it out of the sinner's domain to another domain. This is the concept of V'tashlich b'metzulot yam. In the time of the beit hamikdash all the sins of Klal Yisrael was passed over to the Azazel goat. If a person kills someone he is sentenced to death and the knife used to kill him is buried with him so that the cause of his death should be erased from this world. The idea is that the instrument used to kill is also responsible and a part of his punishment and atonement is that there should be no remembrance of the sin. This is the idea of V'tashlich b'metzulot yam. The punishment is passed to the resha'im and then Hashem forgives us completely.

If a man kills another unintentionally, the killer must run to a city of refuge. He cannot leave until the kohen gadol dies. Rav Avraham the son of the Rambam explains, a kohen gadol is a tremendous inspiration to Klal Yisrael. When he dies, the goel (the relative of the victim) forgets his own personal sorrow and participates in the grief of Klal Yisrael. So much so that the hurt and anger he had towards the killer is no longer the same. Suffering erases sin. Therefore, if we see a sinner suffering we must have mercy on him. In this way we emulate the middah of Hashem that after a person is punished his sins don't exist anymore.

"Titen emet l'Yaakov," Yaakov represents truth more than the other forefathers. The Torah tells us, "Ko tomar l'beit Yaakov." Rashi says this refers to the women. Yaakov signifies what a woman represents. He was tested in a manner that Avraham and Yitzchak weren't tested. Avraham influenced people to do kindness. Yitzchak excelled in gevurah, commitment to Hashem. Yaakov was a paragon of sanctifying the name of Hashem. All the years he lived in the house of Lavan he never succumbed to anger and accepted all his challenges with faith. He signified Torahim derech erez, Torah scholarship with outstanding middot. Notwithstanding all the tension and the accusations Lavan leveled at Yaakov, he remained emet. That is a woman. No matter what difficulty she goes through she's able to absorb it all and remain emet. The numerical value of emet is 441. The numerical value of yud keh vav keh is 21. Twenty one multiplied twice equals 441. If you take the name of Hashem and make it greater, you'll come to emet. The more we see Hashem, the more we will see emet.

In the Ways of the Gentiles Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by **Rabbi Ari Jacobson**

The Kitzur discusses the concept of chukat hagoyim, the Torah prohibition against adopting specifically non-Jewish practices. Hashem commanded us at Har Sinai to be a nation of princes and a holy people. We have a privilege and a responsibility to serve as a light unto the nations. If we are to succeed in our role, it's imperative that we maintain our distinctiveness. Bilaam praised the Jewish people, "Am lavad yishkan..." The Ohr Hachaim explains, when we remain unique we can make a difference and impact the world. When we try to blend into gentile society we lose whatever we try to accomplish. The Rambam writes in Igeret Teiman that when we stood at Sinai, Hashem accepted upon himself to be a guarantor that every Jewish soul would remain loyal to Him and the Torah. However, we as the debtors have to do our part. We have to ensure that we will remain separate from the gentiles so that we can serve as a light to the nations. The Torah tells us, "U'bechukoseihem lo seileichu, do not follow in the ways of the nations." This does not refer to common human practices but rather to a specific type of practice. The Mishna in Masechet Shabbat makes reference to carrying around a fox tooth or a locust egg as a good luck amulet, not much different than a rabbit foot hanging from one's car nowadays. The

Mishna calls this darchei Emori which is another term for violating the prohibition of U'bechukoseihem.

What exactly are the parameters of the prohibition? The Gemara in Masechet Avoda Zara discusses a common practice in ancient times. When a king died all of his personal belongings were burned so that nobody else would be able to use it. The Gemara says if a practice was begun by Jews or begun by both Jews and gentiles or can be explained rationally it is not a violation of U'bechukoseihem. The practice of burning the king's implements is not an issue as it was begun by Jews and demonstrates respect for the king. Carrying around a fox tooth or locust egg is a superstition but if it could somehow medically be explained it wouldn't be a violation. Rav Yosef Kolon noted that even if the original practice didn't have a reason but you now do it for a reason it wouldn't be a violation. An example of this would be a doctor wearing a uniform. This originally started for no reason. Rav Kolon and Rav M. Feinstein write that if one is wearing it for a specific reason in order to be clearly identified it wouldn't be a violation. Another example would be the clanking of glasses after making a toast. Many hold that this is a violation, while others disagree. The Mevasser Tov writes that it can be rationally explained. It's a sign of closeness- I'm not afraid of your drink mixing with mine. Or it's a way of mixing both drinks to determine that neither drink was poisoned, which was apparently a concern years ago. Rabbi Betzalel Zolty writes that a military funeral wouldn't be a violation because there's a reason why it's done.

Any practice that has religious connotation is automatically a violation. The sense one gets is that the original Thanksgiving holiday was a religious Christian celebration in gratitude for making it through the winter and for the bounty that was harvested. In fact, Jefferson felt that Thanksgiving was a violation of church and state. However, the Thanksgiving celebrated today has nothing to do with the original holiday. It did not become a national holiday until Abraham Lincoln declared it so in order to encourage greater unity with the North and South. Once one assumes it does not have religious undertones, it still remains a gentile practice. However, if one celebrates for a reason it becomes permitted.

from: keren18@juno.com <keren18@juno.com> date: Mon, Jul 23, 2018 subject: **Shabbos Stories for Parshas Va'eschanan 5778**

Shabbos Stories for Parshas va'eschanan 5778 Volume 9, Issue 46 16 Menachem Av 5778/ July 28, 2018 Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

A Time to Ask Questions

A young man came to Reb Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, with a long list of questions. Reb Chaim seemed a bit preoccupied but the visitor insisted in asking the questions, to which Reb Chaim responded, one by one. Suddenly, Reb Chaim began tidying himself up and put on a recently pressed kapote (long coat) and new hat, and asked the young man's indulgence. He had to go somewhere but he allowed the visitor to accompany him. The younger man did, peppering him with questions the entire way. They walked a few blocks until they reached a wedding hall. Upon entering, Reb Chaim embraced the groom with a warm hug and kiss, and apologized for the delay. Reb Chaim sat himself among the prestigious Rabbonim who graced the dais as they prepared the marriage documents. The persistent questioner was almost oblivious to the scene and continued to ask more questions and eliciting responses. Reb Chaim tried to juggle the needs of the groom while trying to accommodate the visitor who had besieged him with problems. The persistent questioner received the shock of his life when, as the music began, heralding the march to the Badekin, where the groom, flanked by his father and father-in-law, met the bride and covered her face with the veil. The groom rose from his seat and immediately his future father-in-law took hold of his arm. The groom's father took hold of the other arm. Before he did so, the groom's father turned around and apologized to the stranger who he had been talking to for the last hour or so. He said that would be unable to

help him until after the ceremony. Then, Rabbi Kanievsky nodded Mazel Tov to the hundreds of well-wishers and began the procession to his own son's wedding! (From R.M. Kamenetzky)

Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Masei 5778 email of Torah Sweets Weekly, edited by Reb Mendel Berlin.

What Motivates You? By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

I want to share with my dear readers a sobering true story that warns us about one of the more base sides of the human psyche. There was a man who had a very hard time making a living. He decided to move to Jerusalem and opened a small grocery in the Old City of Yerushalyim. Business took off and by the sweat of his brow he eked out a living and raised, together with his wife, a beautiful family of seven children. All his life he worked very hard and saw his children and grandchildren flourish. To help support his growing family, he continued to work full-time until he was seventy years old. After the passing of his wife, his strength began to ebb and he could no longer work. He spent his days going to shul, saying Tehillim, and listening to shiurim. But, his golden years were marred by a powerful bitterness. His children and grandchildren, for whom he slaved all his life, barely spent any time with him. They were all wrapped-up in their own lives and hardly came to visit. They would pop in, give a sniff to see whether he was still alive, and disappear. Finally, when he got so fed up with their disappointing behavior, he went to the great sage, Rav Shmuel Salant, Zt"l, Zy" a, to pour out his heart. Rav Salant listened carefully and told him the following instruction "Go to a blacksmith and buy an expensive, heavy safe. Bring it home and put it in a very noticeable place." When the man asked Rav Salant how this would help, the Rav said, "Just leave it to me." Mystified, he followed the Rav's instructions and waited to see what would happen

The next time his first-born popped in for a quick visit, he noticed the safe right away. Curious, he asked "Totty, what's in the safe?" His father answered noncommittedly, "Oh, just some things I've saved over the years."

His son told his siblings, "You know, our father has an expensive safe! I tried to move it and it was quite heavy. He must have saved up all of those years he was working." Like wildfire, news traveled through the whole mishpacha and practically overnight, things started to change. He would get regular Sunday visits with the grandchildren in tow, his daughters-in-law suddenly started offering to cook meals, his granddaughters came over to clean the house while his grandsons came to show him their report cards. For the next ten years, he enjoyed his nachas immensely. One night, he peacefully passed away in his sleep. After the funeral, his children came to divide the estate. They immediately went to the safe and started looking for the key – which was nowhere to be found. Finally, after looking through his papers, they found a letter that said, "My Dear Children, The key to the safe is with Rav Shmuel Salant." Quickly, they went to the Rav who gave them the key with a smile upon his lips. Hurriedly, they returned back to the home and excitedly opened the safe. To their shock and dismay, they found it full of odds and ends with no value at all. They got very angry. Their father duped them all of these years. They ran back to Rav Salant to complain about their father's behavior. Rav Salant smiled at them. "Don't be angry at your father. It was my idea. He bitterly complained to me that none of you were visiting him. I told him that you needed some incentive so I created an imaginary pot of gold and you took the bait, hook, line, and sinker. Don't be disappointed. Although it wasn't sincere, you still benefitted greatly from doing ten years of kivud av v'eim." What a chilling story about what drives humanity. There is a grim saying: "Hakesef yaneh es hakol – Money is the answer to everything." As our parents grow older, let's make sure that we honor them and spend time with them, not because of what they have to offer but out of a sense of hakoros hatov, lifelong gratitude to them, and in fulfillment of the Fifth Commandment to honor our father and our mother. But, this is not only true in regards to kivud av v'eim. It pertains to friendships as well. They should not hinge on whether there is

money or not. Nor, should the quality of a shidduch be based on one's latest IRS 1040 tax return form. In the merit of being sincere in our responsibilities, may Hashem bless us with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

Reprinted from the August 3, 2016 website of Matzav.com

Two Numbers By Rabbi David Ashear

When people say over Hashgacha Peratit stories that they experienced, they become so excited from them. And the reason is simple. They experienced, firsthand, the Emunah which they have learned, that Hashem cares about the smallest issues in their lives. They feel so special. "Hashem was thinking about me. And just like I know He's here with me now, I know He's always with me." A woman told me she wanted to get in touch with someone but didn't have her contact information. That same day she attended a Brit Mila. She had to go out in the middle and by the time she came back, most of the people had left already. She made a plate and went to sit by herself. At the table that she chose, right there in front of her, was a piece of paper with the name and number of the woman she needed to reach. She called the woman and the woman told her she was actually at that Brit Mila earlier and she wrote her number down for someone else who must have forgotten it. This woman told me, "It was an amazing feeling. I needed a phone number and right away, there it is, staring me in the face. I felt so close to Hashem." These stories happen to people all the time. And sometimes, when we look back and see how Hashem was orchestrating events, we're in awe. Some stories take years to develop. Each person in the story, Hashem gives a certain amount of information to be a link to the eventual outcome which He wants to bring about. I read a story in the Sefer Emunah Shelemah about a man from Israel who earned his livelihood by being a driver. He had a nice, large van, but business was slow. He decided to go to the airport and wait by the baggage claim, hoping people there might need transportation. Immediately when he arrived, he saw a distinguished man looking for a ride. He offered him his services and the man agreed. During the ride it was getting hot in the car, so the man rolled up his sleeves. When the driver saw his arm, he began to tremble. He was noticeably shaking, and his passenger asked him if everything was okay. He said, "Yes, everything's fine." And he proceeded to tell him a story. He said, "Some years back, I worked on a kibbutz and my job was to sort out apples. I would put the good apples in one pile to be sold and the lower quality apples I would throw into a giant blender that was used for making juice. One day I was interested to see how the blender worked. I had it filled with apples. I climbed up to the top to watch as it would grind up those apples. But suddenly, I lost my balance and I fell into it. I couldn't get out and the machine was running. I started to scream. I had very little time until the blades would start striking me. And then, I felt someone grab me. He pulled me out and saved my life. I thanked him profusely from the bottom of my heart. From that day on, we became close friends. "I noticed that, on occasion, this new friend of mine would just start feeling down. I asked him, 'What's wrong?' He told me he survived the Holocaust and, during the war, he was together with his only brother. But one day, at the end, his brother was taken away from him, and he hasn't seen him since. He doesn't even know if he's alive. Sometimes he just starts thinking about him and becomes sad. The only thing he knew was the number on his brother's arm was one different than his. His was 8862 and his brother's was 8863. It has now been ten years since my friend told me that story, but I'll never forget that number. And now, you raised your sleeve and I see the number on your arm - 8863. I have just discovered my friend's long lost brother!" The man drove straight to where his friend lived, and he was in tears as he watched the brothers hugging each other. The whole episode here was orchestrated by Hashem, from years in advance. The man being saved by one brother, finding out the story with the number and then being the one to find the other brother with that number, ten years later. Hashem is always involved in every moment of our lives, but when we see it, it gives us even more Chizuk.

Reprinted from the July 12, 2013 email of Emunah Daily.

from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Wed, Jul 25, 2018 at 5:18 PM subject: **Rabbi Wein - 10 Principles for Humanity**

10 Principles for Humanity

The text of the review of the Ten Commandments that appears in this week's Torah reading differs slightly from the text that appeared previously in the book of Shemot. As you can well understand, there has been much commentary and explanation over the centuries of Jewish scholarship regarding these differences in words, even though the basic ideas of the Commandments remain constant in both versions of the text.

The Talmud assigns some of the differences in the text to the Godly revelation at Sinai where miraculously the Lord, so to speak, uttered two words in a simultaneous fashion, something that is beyond human ability and comprehension. Other differences in the text are explained through halachic and aggadic interpretation.

Over the centuries many of the great commentators of Israel have added their insights and interpretations of these texts and their eternal meanings and messages. It has been suggested that to convey these sometimes hidden and misunderstood nuances, Moshe in his review of the events of his 40 years as the leader of Israel in the desert of Sinai purposely restates, albeit with minor differences, the text of the basic principles of human and Jewish civilization.

There is fascinating discussion over the centuries as to what the text that was inscribed on the tablets of stone actually stated. There is also discussion as to what type of Hebrew font was used – that of ancient Hebrew called 'ktav ivri' or the font that we are all familiar with from our scrolls of the Torah, 'ktav ashuei.' The Torah has always proved itself to be a never-ending source of inspiration, fascination, wonder and questions.

The ability for human society to exist and prosper is always in doubt, through the centuries of violence and war, exploitation and cruelty and in the norms of so-called civilized society. All of this is rooted in the unfortunate tendency of human beings to disregard the tenets and spirit of the Ten Commandments.

Respect for human life and for the property of others, a system of fair justice and law enforcement, respect for elders and, above all, the appreciation of the universal God that creates and guides all of us, are the bedrock principles of Judaism as reflected in the Ten Commandments. The abhorrence of sexual immorality and of falseness and untruths shine forth from the eternal words of the commandments. Without these principles being followed and appreciated humankind is always only a step away from being essentially an extension of the animal kingdom.

All the preaching that goes on in the world about higher values and human freedoms are of little benefit without a commitment to the observance of the Ten Commandments. There are all sorts of moral ideals and organizations that flood our modern world. But, without the existence of the realization of God in our personal and national lives, these moralities will always be inadequate and insufficient to prevent the descent into barbarism and destruction. We should pay close attention to the text of the Ten Commandments that we will hear read from the Torah this Shabbat.

Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

from: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Tue, Jul 24, 2018 at 1:59 PM subject: Mezuzah Basics

There are many articles on the website about various questions germane to mezuzah, tefillin and other mitzvos mentioned in this week's parsha. The current article combines write-ups from two very different discussions about mezuzah.

Mezuzah Basics

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The "Ten Commandments" of Mezuzah The laws governing where one places a mezuzah are, indeed, complicated. The Rambam (Hilchos Mezuzah 6:1) codifies ten necessary requirements that must be fulfilled for a house or room to be obligated to have a mezuzah.

1. The room must have a minimum area of four amos by four amos (which is about fifty square feet). In the Rambam's opinion, it is not necessary that each side be at least four amos wide – if the room or building's area is at least sixteen square amos, one must place a mezuzah on its entrance. Thus, according to the Rambam's opinion, a room that is three amos wide and six amos long requires a mezuzah.

However, the Rosh and others disagree, contending that a room three amos wide and six amos long does not require a mezuzah, since it does not have four amos in each dimension. In other words, they contend that a normal living area must be at least four amos in both its length and its width.

Although the authorities accept the Rambam's position as the primary halachic opinion, and therefore one is required to place a mezuzah at the doorway to a room that is sixteen square amos, even if it is narrower than four amos (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:13), we do not recite a beracha when placing only this mezuzah. Instead, should there be another doorway that is definitely required to have a mezuzah, one should recite a beracha prior to placing this mezuzah, following which he can put up a mezuzah on the door of the room that is narrower than four amos (Shach). (This is the general rule that is applied for any case when there is a safek whether one must install a mezuzah. One does not recite a beracha, but it is optimal to place this mezuzah immediately after putting up a different mezuzah that requires a beracha, thereby including the safek situation with the beracha.)

Let us now return to the Rambam's Ten Mezuzah Rules – that is, the ten necessary conditions that require a house or room to have a mezuzah.

2. The entrance must have sideposts on both sides. I will soon explain what this means.

3. The entrance must have a mashkof, that is, something that comes down vertically, similar to the way a lintel functions as the top of a doorway.

4. The room or house must be roofed. An enclosed yard or porch without a roof does not require a mezuzah, although sometimes the doorway to an unroofed yard or porch functions as an entrance to the house and requires a mezuzah for this reason. However, a doorway of an unroofed room or building that is not an entranceway to a house does not need a mezuzah.

5. In the Rambam's opinion, a mezuzah is required only when the house or room's entrance has a door. In this instance, the Rambam's position is a minority opinion, since most other Rishonim contend that the lack of a door does not absolve the requirement of a mezuzah. The accepted conclusion is to install a mezuzah in a doorway that has no door, but not to recite a beracha when doing so (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:15). (Again, the best option here is to place this mezuzah immediately after putting up a mezuzah in a place that all opinions require one, with the beracha recited on the latter mezuzah.)

6. The sideposts of the entrance are at least ten tefachim tall, which is between 32 and 38 inches.

7. The house or room does not have the sanctity of a shul or beis medrash. In the Rambam's opinion, a beis medrash does not require a mezuzah. Most authorities rule that one should place a mezuzah on a beis medrash, and, therefore, accepted practice is to place a mezuzah on any beis medrash, but without a beracha. Common practice today is to treat a shul as a beis medrash and, therefore, to place a mezuzah on its door without a beracha.

8. The house or room is intended for human habitation. For example, stables and barns are absolved of the requirement of mezuzah.

9. The house or room is meant for an honorable use, as opposed to a bathroom or similar rooms, where we do not install a mezuzah.

10. The room or house is intended for permanent use. For this reason, we do not install a mezuzah on a sukkah.

The next section is an edited version of an actual correspondence that I was asked via e-mail.

Bs"d

Dear Rav Kaganoff,

I have a sad financial/gezel sheilah for the Rav.

My former employers owe me several hundred pounds. In legal documents, through their lawyer, they have acknowledged that they owe me the money. They have also made it clear that they are not going to pay it. The only way to get the money, at this point, would be if I went to secular court, since it is quite clear, based on their track record, that they would not obey a ruling of a beis din. My wife and I have decided that we cannot afford this. It would cost us more than we would probably win.

However, when we moved, the moving company accidentally packed mezuzos which belong to the former employer. These mezuzos are now sitting in my lift boxes waiting to be unpacked when we move into our new apartment in two weeks.

Prior to accepting this job, the employer had instructed me to purchase mezuzos that I would need for the house that we were renting. He reimbursed us for them two months later.

The money the employer owes me is predominantly from unpaid reimbursements. Frequently, there were expenditures that I made out-of-pocket for which they were supposed to reimburse me. Each month when they reimbursed me, they never paid the full amount. They always shortchanged me -- 20 pounds here, 10 pounds there. At the end of my employment, they owed me several hundred pounds of out-of-pocket expenses. And, more recently, they stopped paying the reimbursements altogether.

Am I allowed to keep the mezuzos, since I was the one who originally bought them?

Thanks very much

xx

My answer:

The fact that you had purchased the mezuzos is not relevant. What is germane is the issue of "tefisah" -- a creditor (or other person owed money) taking something belonging to the debtor (or person who owes money) on account of the debt.

In this case, if the value of the mezuzos is certainly less than the amount you are owed, it is permitted to keep them. Best wishes. Sources: The question of "grabbing" (taking hold of) property for purpose of reclaiming bad debt is discussed extensively by authorities. Permission to do so, in appropriate circumstances, is found in a number of authorities (see Choshen Mishpat 4; Sema 4:3; see also Gra 4:15). In the case of your question, because you are already in possession of the mezuzos, the case is more lenient, and you can certainly rely on the permitting poskim. A condition for this is that you can prove your case in Beis Din. From the question, I understand that this is the case -- the documents you have prove the employer's debt, and this will be admissible in Beis Din -- so that it is permitted to keep the mezuzos on account of the debt. It is indeed ironic, or perhaps not at all so, that this a mezuzah is to remind us that Hashem protects us, and that this question came from someone whose employer forgot that Who is in charge!

Mezuzah Rewards Aside from fulfilling a mitzvah commanded by Hashem, the mitzvah of mezuzah serves to remind us constantly of His presence. We touch the mezuzah whenever we enter or exit a building to remind ourselves of Hashem's constant presence, so that the mezuzah serves as a physical and spiritual protective shield. Whenever passing it, we should remind ourselves of Hashem's constant protection. In addition, the Gemara teaches that someone who is meticulous in his observance of the laws of mezuzah will merit acquiring a nice home (Shabbos 23b). We thus see that care in observing this mitzvah not only protects one's family against any calamity, but also rewards one with a beautiful domicile. May we all be zocheh to always be careful in our observance of the laws of mezuzah and

the other mitzvos, and reap all the rewards, both material and spiritual, for doing so!