

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Bo 5772

Mazal Tov !!!

Mazal Tov Sari & Jay Goldstein on their wedding this past week .. enjoy the Shabbat Sheva Brachot celebrations. May Hashem bless you with a long and happy life together.

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, January 27, 2012

TRADITION :: Rabbi Berel Wein

As much as the Jewish religious world is built upon the Written and Oral Law of the Torah, it also contains another component that is almost equally important – tradition. Tradition in the Jewish world comes in the form of family, customs, societal norms and perhaps, most importantly, in attitudes and worldview. The absence of an unbroken set of societal and family traditions creates a skewed view and an unintended distortion of Jewish life and mores.

Much of the troubles that we see today within Jewish religious life, especially here in Israel, stems from the fact that there exists within the religious world a large section that for various reasons (as I hope to point out later in this article) lacks tradition though it is heavy on observance and even on Torah study.

Scholarship that is not leavened by tradition and societal mores tends to become distorted and narrow in its view and leads to strange behavior and attitudes and even violence that cannot be justified since it in essence stands against the value systems of Torah which govern halacha and proper Jewish life.

Professor Chaim Soloveitchik pointed out in a seminal essay decades ago that Orthodox Jewry after the Holocaust shifted from a societal based faith group to one that became a book dominated grouping. In this he signaled that the chain of societal tradition that had guided Jewish life for centuries in the Diaspora was now broken, discarded and would shortly no longer even be remembered as having existed at all. And this is a pretty accurate summation of the situation in the Jewish religious world today.

The Holocaust is the primary reason for the breakdown of tradition in Jewish society today. The people who were the bearers of that tradition were murdered. Ninety eight percent of Lithuanian Jewry was destroyed by the Germans, the Russian Bolsheviks, and the Lithuanians. The survivors found themselves in alien societies, uprooted and in the main silent about their experiences and their previous lives. Thus they never spoke about what life in Lithuania was and what its societal mores and worldview was.

Ninety five percent of Polish and Ukrainian Jewry were similarly destroyed and again the survivors never were willing or able to recreate the conditions of life of Eastern Europe where their family and societal traditions flourished. Those that came to Israel found themselves in a Kulturkampf with the secularist, atheistic, leftist establishment that then governed the yishuv and the nascent state.

In America the survivors found themselves in a society that encouraged forgetting the mores of the Old World and still promoted the “melting pot” goal of complete immersion and assimilation into American life. Thus the “new Jew” did in fact emerge in the religious Jewish world – a Jew that was observant and devoted to Torah study and willing to defend the Torah way

of life as it was now almost newly created against all foes and by any means at hand.

But the “new Jew” had no sense of the tradition of Jewish society and its behavior patterns. Instead it was fed or created legends, stories, myths, and built its society around these illusions and fabrications.

And this has created the current impasse of attitudes and problems that face us in every facet of societal Jewish life. This has driven us to extremism because the sense of normalcy and proportion that tradition always imparted to the next generation was destroyed.

Added to the mix in religious Jewish life was the advent of movements that successfully “returned” thousands of children of non-observant and assimilated Jewish families to ritual observance and to Torah study. These wonderful people arrived naturally without any family or societal Jewish tradition. And more often than not, those who were their mentors and guides also suffered from not having traditional Jewish societal norms as part of their own education.

Many of those who “returned” gravitated towards extreme sects in their search for their souls and spirituality. What in Eastern Europe were marginal groups, fringe yeshivot, radical idealists now became mainstream in the religious Jewish world. The continuing never-ending political turmoil that marks Israeli life and society has also contributed to the mainstreaming of what are really fringe, truly non-traditional groups and ideas.

So the traditions of Jewish society in so many societal issues have been forgotten or distorted beyond recognition. The difficulties of creating a new balanced norm of societal behavior and worldview - a new tradition if you wish – are enormous. But somehow it must be achieved for religious Jewish life to grow, prosper and be successful.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: BO :: Rabbi Berel Wein

This week’s parsha is the introduction to the halachic process of observance of the commandments of the Torah. In every commandment there are numerous layers of meaning and importance. There is the social and moral value that the commandment represents and teaches. There are also the technical minutiae and complex details that comprise the fabric of every commandment.

The commandments regarding the observance of Pesach and of the structuring of the Jewish calendar are part of this week’s parsha. The general values of these commandments are apparent to all. Pesach represents for us the value and concept of freedom from bondage and teaches us the beginning history of our people. The calendar has always been a necessity for social and commercial life and keeps us in tune with the changing seasons of the year.

These are the general reasons and lessons of these commandments. However, as we also all know, the devil always lies in the details. What is the mechanism that will enable the story of our departure from Egyptian slavery to freedom to remain fresh and vital thousands of years later? Values only have life if they are somehow translated into human action and normative behavior.

Theories are wonderful but they rarely survive the tests of time and ever changing circumstances. Every scientific theory is therefore subjected to be proven by physical experiment and validation. Freedom is a great theory but unless somehow put into practical application in society it remains divorced from the realities of everyday existence. Just ask the North Koreans or the Syrians and Iranians about freedom! It is the technical requirements of the commandment – the matzo, chametz, hagadah, etc. – that alone are able to preserve the value and validate the theory and guarantee its meaningfulness for millennia on end.

The uniqueness of the Jewish calendar lies also in its technical details. The permanent calendar that we now follow, established in the fifth century CE, is a lunar calendar with adjustments to make it fit into a solar year span. The technical halachic details how the last Sanhedrin squared this circle are too numerous and detailed for the scope of this parsha sheet.

However, suffice it to say, that if not for those details and calculations our calendar would long ago have disappeared just as the ancient calendars of Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome have disappeared. Many people look at calendars not as Godly commandments but as merely a practical way to mark our passage through time. Thus the details are really not important to them since we are only interested in the so-called result.

But in Judaism, the details are of equal if not even greater importance than the general value and end result that they represent. In our time, those Jews who for various reasons only concentrated on the values, who were good Jews at heart but observed no commandments or details, rarely were privileged to have Jewish descendants.

Of course concentrating only on the details and ignoring the value system that it represents is also a distortion of the Godly word. Seeing both the general value of a commandment and observing its necessary technical details in practice is the guarantee for allowing the Torah to survive amongst the people of Israel for all times.

Shabat shalom.

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Bo

Hashem said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart... stubborn... and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt. (9:1,2)

Hashem informs Moshe Rabbeinu that He is keeping up the pressure on Pharaoh by threatening and exacting greater punishments. All this is for the purpose of teaching the Jewish People how He toyed with the Egyptians. The idea that Hashem manipulated the Egyptians is novel and begs elucidation. Why play with people who warrant powerful rebuke and punishment? Hashem punishes the wicked with serious punishments - not by toying with them. Imagine a child acting inappropriately at home. His father's response is, "I am going to show you what I can do to you." Obviously, the father is going to support his threat with some form of corporeal punishment. He will certainly not make a joke out of it. Indeed, if the purpose of the makos, plagues, was that Egypt would acknowledge Hashem's Presence,

how would this occur if their punishment was a form of ridicule? Making a fool out of someone is hardly a punishment.

Horav Aryeh Leib Bakst, zl, explains that, indeed, derision, mockery, needling and ridicule are methods which may be used to deliver a message of rebuke effectively. This is especially necessary when the sinner has descended to such a nadir that he actually believes what he is doing is appropriate, and even laudatory. Talking to such an individual is a waste of time. He is secure in his belief. On the contrary, it is the individual who tenders the rebuke that needs to be enlightened. He is blind to the "beauty" of the ways of the sinner. He is living in the Dark Ages. If he would get out and have a "life," so to speak, he would understand that the ways of the sinner are consistent with his thought process. One who has sunk to such a level is beyond reason. He will not be moved with words of reproof; chastisement means nothing to him. If anything, it emboldens him to do greater evil.

Such a person might respond to ridicule. When the sinner sees how he is being perceived, when he realizes that people do not take him seriously, that they see him as some kind of mindless fool, his heart, the seat of his emotions, might begin to respond. No one wants to be put down. Everyone wants respect. To be ignored, toyed with, ridiculed, sends home a message: What you are doing is senseless, irresponsible, laughable, and moronic. A person would rather be viewed as evil than as an idiot.

This is the idea behind, "So that you will relate in the ears of your son and son's son..." teach your son that it is possible to descend to such a low level that tochachah, reproach, no longer is an option. The only way to reach such a person is through the hisalalti method, whereby one is made to feel like a joke; his actions are ridiculed, and his beliefs are ignored.

Pharaoh believed in himself to the point that he ascribed divinity to himself. He was a god. He would go to the river at dawn to relieve himself, so that no one would know the truth. It was specifically at this time that Hashem instructed Moshe to meet with Pharaoh. Imagine his shame and embarrassment at being confronted by Moshe. Yet, Hashem sent Moshe at this time specifically for that reason: to show Pharaoh that he was a nothing, a chameleon attempting to cover up his true stripes. This was the only form of tochachah to which he would respond.

And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem. (9:2)

Every generation has its despots, evil-doers who prey on the weak, the insecure and the unprotected. The Jewish People have had to contend with villains of all stripes: religious demagogues; sociopaths; psychopaths; and felons of all persuasions. Ultimately, they all have gone down in infamy, receiving their due punishment, which Hashem ultimately metes out at his discretion. The question, however, still gnaws at us: Why are so many evildoers permitted to continue their corruption unabated? While this question can only be answered from a spiritual perspective, the following vignette does shed some light on the matter.

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, once had occasion to spend the night at an inn that belonged to an observant Jew. While he was there, Rav Yisrael noticed that the innkeeper was actually quite lax in his mitzvah observance. When the innkeeper took note of Rav Yisrael's displeasure, he felt the need to vindicate his slipshod

observance: "Rebbe, there is an individual in our community who openly flaunts his disregard for Torah and mitzvos. Yet, nothing happens to him: no punishment; no hint of Divine retribution. Why? It is because he lives with impunity that I have decided, "Why bother?" Rav Yisrael did not respond.

Shortly thereafter, the innkeeper's young daughter returned from a music lesson, proudly displaying the award she had received for playing the violin. Rav Yisrael asked her to play something for him. The girl demurred, instead showing him her award. Her behavior seemed a bit standoffish, so her father explained the reason for his daughter's reluctance to put on a private show of her expertise. She had worked hard and was given an award indicating her proficiency in playing the violin. This should be considered proof of her talent. She would not be expected to play the violin for every guest that visits her father's inn.

Rav Yisrael looked hard and long at the innkeeper: "Do you hear what you just said? Are you paying attention to your own words? Once the award has been granted, it is not necessary to prove one's self daily every time someone wants to hear her play. You wonder why Hashem does not punish that fellow? Do you think that Hashem is obligated to provide miracles for the benefit of every sinner? Hashem proved Himself in Egypt. Every Jew since the Egyptian exodus is acutely aware of the Almighty's powers. He received His "award" in Egypt when He clearly defined who was evil and meted out their punishment.

But against Bnei Yisrael, no dog shall wet its tongue. (11:7)

Simply, this means that Egypt will be engulfed with death and grief. The Jews, however, will enjoy complete respite and tranquility; not even a dog will bark or howl against them. What is the significance of the dogs barking - or not barking? Does it really make a difference? Everything that is recorded in the Torah has a message. What is the message of the dog's restraint from barking? The Bais HaLevi, zl, explains with the following anecdote. A terrible dispute erupted in the city of Brisk. Two groups took sides against one another, with the fires of controversy being fanned throughout the community. As Rav of the city, the Bais HaLevi sought a way to extinguish the flames of hatred and put an end to the machlokes, dispute.

The Rav called in the most influential lay leaders of the community and enjoined them to speak with both sides to put an end to the strife that was rapidly splintering the community. The response was, regrettably, what has become quite common: the leaders refused to get involved, lest it be inferred that they were taking sides. They felt that, by remaining neutral and above board with everyone, they would maintain their standing in the community. By getting involved, they would be portrayed as essentially taking sides - something they could not do.

Rav Yoshe Ber viewed their response as obsequious and servile, literally a "cop-out" from assuming responsibility as communal leaders. He told them, "Your neutral attitude has precedent among the dogs who lived in Egypt during the Exodus. In the Talmud Bava Kamma 60b, Chazal teach that when the Malach HaMaves, Angel of Death, comes to a city, the dogs begin to weep, they whine mournfully in response to the impending death that visits the city. In contrast, when the dogs sense the presence of Eliyahu HaNavi they laugh, their barking emitting a playful sound. Now, in Egypt, on the night of the Redemption, both Eliyahu HaNavi, who heralded the Exodus, and the Angel of Death, who had a function to perform of slaying the Egyptian

firstborn, came to town. What is a dog to do? Should he recognize Eliyahu and bark playfully, or give precedence to the Angel of Death and bark mournfully? The dogs decided to keep their collective mouths shut. They remained neutral - not wishing to take a stand by getting involved.

The lay leadership took the hint and immediately addressed the issues, which were soon resolved.

And you shall observe the matzos, for on this very day I brought out your hosts from the land of Egypt. (12:17)

Rashi cites the well-known Midrash which tells us not to read the word as matzos, but as mitzvos (which has a similar spelling). We derive from here that "just as one is not to allow matzoh to become leavened, so, too, may one not cause leavening with regard to any mitzvah; rather, if a mitzvah comes to your hand (it becomes available), perform it immediately." When the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, one should not push it off. Go for it immediately. Every mitzvah is precious, and every moment is valuable. They may not be squandered.

The need to incorporate zerizus, alacrity, joyful willpower, excitement, into our mitzvah performance is underscored by the fact that the Torah restricts chametz, leavening, from being brought on the Altar as part of various meal-offerings. No chametz was permitted on the Mizbayach. The Sefer HaChinuch explains that this prohibition helps imprint on our psyche the need to acquire the attribute of zerizus in our service of Hashem. Leavening is the natural result of delay in the dough-making process. The Altar is the sight chosen by Hashem as the symbolic place from which korbanos, sacrifices, which represent our personal attitude and willingness to offer ourselves up to Hashem, are burnt. This fire serves as our proxy, our medium of service, and, thus, demonstrates our joyful willingness to serve Him.

Zerizus is the middah, character trait, which helps us fulfill our dreams. It transitions us from wishful thinking to taking action. It is the middah that defines everything we do. If our attitude concerning mitzvah observance is slothful, it indicates that we are far from excited about serving Hashem. As zerizus becomes a part of our lives, we discover our practical accomplishments, which will ultimately lead us to happier, more meaningful lives. It is all about doing, achieving, while thinking about acting gets us nowhere.

Horav Chaim Friedlander, zl, explains that when the pasuk exhorts us to prevent Pesach matzos from becoming chametz, Chazal derive a lesson concerning the underlying essence of the mitzvah of Matzah. Our sages reveal to us that the secret of the mitzvah of Matzah is concealed within the lesson we must derive from the Jewish People's haste in leaving Egypt. In other words, we are being taught the overriding significance of the middah of zerizus. As Klal Yisrael were unable to achieve freedom without the medium of zerizus, so, too, is it impossible to fulfill the Torah and execute its mitzvos properly without the power of zerizus. The zerizus factor determines whether it is truly a mitzvah.

The mitzvah is meant to teach a lesson: one must be a zariz, enthusiastically diligent, and alacritous in his service of Hashem. Chametz occurs when one does nothing, when nature takes its course. As human beings, we are naturally slothful. To be a zariz is to go against nature. Matzah, like zerizus, is the product of working against the forces of nature. At the end of his treatise on

zerizus, the Mesillas Yesharim, writes: "The Scriptures describe the Heavenly angels as having zerizus to carry out the Divine bidding..." The pasuk in Yechezkel 1:14 describes them as acting swiftly as streaks of lightning. While a person is a human being not an angel... his aspiration should be to emulate their zerizus, as David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 119:60, "I was quick, and I did not hesitate in observing Your mitzvos."

What is the Ramchal teaching us? After his thesis on zerizus, he notes that the angels have been lauded for their exemplary alacrity in serving Hashem. We should aspire to be like them. The question is simple: What relationship do we simple humans have with angels? How can we strive to be like them? How can this be expected of us? Zerizus is an attribute ascribed to angels. We are not angels.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that the Heavenly angels are to our example, our standard for defining avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. Hashem wants us to be as "angel-like" as we can be, to emulate the Angels - not humans - but Heavenly angels! This is a powerful statement and an awesome mission. No one has ever said that to be an observant Jew is a walk in the park. It is an awesome responsibility, which, after one has mastered it, becomes his greatest source of joy.

In "Lights Along the Way," Rabbi A. Twerski explains this concept from a practical perspective. The human being is a composite of a physical body, much like that of any brute beast, subject to physical strivings and desires. He also has a neshamah, a spiritual soul, a Divine spirit, much akin to that of an angel.

An animal cannot be condemned for acting out its cravings and physical temptations. After all, it is only an animal. An angel which is comprised of pure spirit really cannot be lauded for executing Hashem's Will, because he is not "something spiritual", he is pure spirit. The human being consists of both of these qualities: part animal, part angel. A man is considered spiritual when his spiritual magnitude overwhelms and transcends his physical dimension. When man allows the angelic quality of his being to control his physical component, thereby deterring his behavior, he has achieved a significant step towards spirituality.

There is no dearth of stories concerning the middah of zerizus. The following story, however, incorporates the lesson of zerizus into the mitzvah of Matzoh and, by Chazal's inference, to all mitzvos. In his Sefer Nitzotzos, Horav Yitzchak HersHKowitz, Shlita, relates the story of a pious Jew, whom we will call Shaul, growing up in Russia during the beginning of the Communist revolution. Life was difficult for the Jews under the Russian Czars. Indeed, there was hope that, with advent of the new wave, the movement called Communism, their lot would improve. How wrong they were.

At the onset, Communism was the movement that would help the workers. Capitalism was an anathema. All monies would be divided equally. Division of classes among the people would be eliminated. Everyone would prosper. The people soon realized that the movement would enslave them like none other. Everyone began to suffer, but none had it worse than the Jews. After all, Communism was an agnostic belief. There was no place for G-d in their society. While most religions deferred to the pressure, small pockets of Jews remained who stubbornly stood steadfast and resolute, refusing to renege on their beliefs. Shaul was one of these pious individuals. A Stoliner chasid, he sought out the

Rebbe, Horav Yisrael, zl, for guidance and inspiration. In 1922, when the Rebbe died, his son, Horav Yochanan, became Rebbe. At the time, Shaul lived in Kiev and not only personally observed mitzvos, he saw ways to organize campaigns for Tefillin, Shabbos and Bris Milah. Constantly risking his life, he felt it a privilege to serve the Almighty in this manner.

After a short while, Shaul was caught and sentenced to Siberia as a dissident. His sectarian actions in rallying other Jews were criminal, and he was fortunate not to be executed for his subversion against the ruling government. This punishment did not alter Shaul's avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. He assembled as many Jews as were willing to concede their heritage, to make a makeshift clandestine shul. He smuggled in with him a few pairs of Tefillin, some Siddurim, and Chumashim. They had a bais ha'medrash. Shaul feared no one - other than Hashem. This is how he lived. Obviously, the Communist government discovered his insurrection and quickly put an end to his religious services.

Shaul was a problem that would not go away. Wherever he went, he attracted other Jews who, albeit alienated, seemed to follow him. The judges decided that the only way to put an end to Shaul's influence was to incarcerate him in a place that was desolate from society, especially Jews. It was decided that Shaul was to be sent up north, just about to Vladivostok, an area that had no Jews and practically no people. This was to them the end of the earth, the climate being far from hospitable. The few people were not much different.

Shaul found himself one Jew among one hundred base farmers, whose entire day revolved around the two meals they were served daily. Shaul's goal was to maintain his Jewishness, both in appearance and action, even in this miserable place. The Communists had taken his Tefillin and whatever few seforim he had. They could not, however, take Hashem away from him.

It was an unusually cold winter, even for Siberia, but Shaul was preoccupied with keeping track of the days, so that he could determine the Yomim Tovim, Festivals. His primary focus was on how to obtain six Matzos for the Pesach Sedarim. One would think that this should be furthest from his mind, but Shaul was an unusual person. Torah was his raison d'tre. Mitzvos coursed through his veins.

According to his calculations, he had reached the fifteenth of Adar, and Pesach would occur in another month. How was he to fulfill his dream of eating Matzah on Pesach? The Russians had taken his body, enslaved and broken it, but they could not penetrate his noble neshamah, soul. His mind was free to soar in the heavens.

Among the hundred or so inmates incarcerated in this jail was a teenage boy whose name was Vladimir. He kept to himself and did not speak. Indeed, while the other inmates were regaling each other with stories of their previous life, Vladimir said nothing. He, thus, became an outcast - among outcasts. Since Shaul was the only one who never questioned the reason for Vladimir's incarceration, the boy warmed up to him. He related the story of his life to Shaul, and, after a while, he opened up completely to him. Shaul felt that this relationship was a G-d-send, since Vladimir was one of the few prisoners who worked from early morning until late at night in the wheat fields a few miles from their prison. Shaul presented Vladimir with a proposition: If he would daily bring him a few kernels of wheat, he would give him

his breakfast. This was an incredible offer, since the little food that the inmates received was certainly insufficient in providing energy for an entire day's toil. An extra portion would certainly go a long way. On the other hand, Shaul was prepared to starve for weeks as long as he would obtain his precious Matzah.

Vladimir did not understand the purpose of the few kernels of wheat, but he definitely could use another breakfast. Slowly, every day, Shaul, weakened by his daily fast, gathered the kernels, ground them into flour and found a way to bake his Matzos. Pesach night, he sat back and made a Seder. It was not much. He had his Matzos; Marror, bitterness, was certainly not at a premium. Alas, he had no wine. He would subsist on his Matzos. With courage borne of faith and trust in the Almighty, Shaul remained strong until the summer, when the Russians finally allowed him to leave.

Shaul entered his hometown of Kiev on what was, according to his calculations, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul. We can imagine his shock and disbelief when he was told that it was only Tammuz 29. He was off by a month. He practically fainted on the spot. It had just hit him - he had conducted the Pesach Seder when the rest of the Jewish world was celebrating Purim! Not only had he not celebrated Pesach properly, he had, in fact, eaten chametz on Pesach! Shaul was a broken person. Siberia did not break him, but the thought of eating chametz on Pesach was too much for him to bear.

Shaul eventually emigrated to the United States. He heard that the Stoliner Rebbe had been spared from the Nazi terror. The Rebbe had been living in Eretz Yisrael, but was coming to America to give comfort and solace to his many chassidim who survived as embers from the flames of the European inferno. Shaul decided that he would join with the throngs of people waiting to greet the Rebbe.

He waited hours until, finally, it came his turn to meet the Rebbe. Shaul entered the room, shook the Rebbe's hand and broke into uncontrollable weeping. After explaining the reason for his excessive emotion, the Rebbe sat back and also wept. Mi k'Amcha Yisrael! "Who is like Your nation, Yisrael!" A man goes through years of suffering at the hands of ruthless creatures; yet, his only complaint was that he had erred and eaten chametz on Pesach!

The Rebbe looked at Shaul and said, "True, you did not fulfill the part of the pasuk that exhorts us to guard the Matzos from becoming chametz, but, you certainly fulfilled the interpretation of U'shemartem es ha'mitzvos!" Hashem does not look at the conclusion. He cares about one's attitude, his fervor and toil, his sacrifice and devotion. Hashem looks at the heart one puts into mitzvah performance. You gave up your daily bread, so that you could partake of Matzah on Pesach. Do you think for one moment that this is not precious in Heaven? You have provided Hashem with a treasure. Do not fret, Shaul. Hashem accepted your Matzah as the most worthy korban, offering!"

Shaul was obviously shaken by these words. He gathered his courage and asked the Rebbe, "Would the Rebbe please write this, so that I can keep it with me?" Paper was brought, and the Rebbe wrote and affixed his signature to the "note." Shaul left a new person.

A number of years passed, and Shaul lay on his deathbed, surrounded by his family. He had lived a difficult life, but Hashem had blessed him with a beautiful family from whom he

had derived much satisfaction. Now, it was time to say "good-bye". Shaul turned to his oldest son and asked him to bring him a sealed envelope that lay in his desk drawer. After his son had brought it, and Shaul removed the note that was inside, he said to his son, "Please be sure that this note is placed beneath my head in the grave. It is my passport to Gan Eden."

V'kulam mekablīm aleihem ol Malchus Shomayim zeh mi'zeh.

And all of them accept upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven from each other.

Interestingly, despite their overwhelming desire to praise Hashem, the Malachim do not press forward to hasten their individual praise of Hashem. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains that this "relaxed" attitude is the result of their understanding the significance of their song of praise, which is the study and contemplation of their profound knowledge of Hashem. Thus, they "wait" to receive admonition and exhortation from each other. This is the instruction of caution and inspiration to assume the yoke of responsibility and effort, to search deeply into the profundities of their knowledge of Hashem, so that their perceptions of His Greatness will be more accurate. The fundamental service of Hashem is the yoke of recognizing the Kingdom of Heaven in all phenomena. This is the meaning of kabolas ol Malchus Shomayim. The Angels clearly have a deeper perception than mere mortals do. Nonetheless, we must strive to imbue ourselves with this sense of seeking, to discover the "Hashem factor" in all that exists.

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By her children, Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
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The first phase of the exodus from Egypt is excitingly described in parshas Bo. In Va'eschanan (4:34), the Torah characterizes the exodus as "has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation" (goy mi'kerev goy). The Yalkut vividly compares the above to the birthing process. Just as the fetus / embryo is so attached to the mother, literally nourished and sustained there from, so too were the Jewish people assimilated and acculturated in Egypt. As the Egyptians were uncircumcised and groomed their hair in 'bluris style', so did the vast majority of Jews. The above analogy is further understood that just as the birth process is exceedingly dangerous, that if the midwife or farmer were to initiate the process and attempt to extricate the baby from its mother too soon, it could be fatal for both, and only after some initial movement and activity on the part of the fetus does it signal the commencement of the process. So too in Egypt, the exodus spearheaded by G-d could only begin with the nationalistic stirrings of the Jewish nation, initiating the birth and creation of their nation.

In light of the above we can appreciate some of the details of law that were applicable only in Egypt accompanying the first Pesach seder. The Torah commands that the Pascal lamb be slaughtered and roasted on the fourteenth of the first month, the day prior to their exodus. They were to slaughter the god of Egypt, thereby

actively renouncing and showing the powerlessness of the Egyptian divine. What is most perplexing, however, is why were they mandated to smear the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and lintel (12:7)? The B'ear Yosef suggests the following: given that the lamb was roasted (12:8) the aroma wafted in the homes of the Egyptians as well. Lest an Egyptian invite himself into the Jewish home for some of the barbecue, the blood of his god on the door was a horrific degradation, causing him to do an immediate about face.

The birth pangs of Egypt were the specific actions that the Jewish nation underwent that evening, celebrating their anticipated freedom. It is these Jewish stirrings from amidst the culture of Egypt that alerted Hashem as to their readiness for deliverance.

The Torah further commands, (12:22) "no man shall leave the entrance of his house till morning". The Torah does not give a reason for this prohibition. The Meshech Chachma provides a most insightful understanding to the above. The Ramban explains that the description of Yaakov's struggle - (Breishis 32:25) "Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn" - portends the struggle between the forces of Esav and Yaakov till the end of time. Similarly, the Meshech Chachma understands this verse as the formula for survival of the Jewish people in galus, in the diaspora. One is not to leave the safeguards of the Jewish home till 'morning', till the final redemption arrives. His thesis is that certain mitzvos play a more pivotal and paramount role than others, especially in galus. The seyagim - those mitzvos that were instituted to protect and safeguard the Jewish home - are crucial for the survival of our people. Thus, the Talmud (Shabbos 17b) lists the 18 enactments that the rabbis instituted including bishul akum- the prohibition of a non-Jew cooking for a Jew even if the food is kosher. This law, still in effect today, was instituted to prevent socialization between Jew and non-Jew. A non-Jew cannot prepare a meal for the Jew without their participation in the cooking process. The Talmud (Avodah Zorah 42b) states that included in this seyag is the prohibition of stam ya-nam, i.e. the prohibition of a non-Jew handling kosher wine (unless pasteurized), again to thwart socialization and assimilation.

The Meshech Chachma notes, that historically at the time of the Egyptian exodus, we did not yet have the Jewish laws, but had the nationalistic actions that warranted Divine approval in the form of magnificent miracles that were performed on our behalf. In sharp contrast, at the time of our exodus from Babylon, we were observant of Jewish laws, but negligent in the safeguards of our identity, as found in Nechemia (13:23-24). The Jewish youth spoke Ashdodis, they assumed non-Jewish names, and intermarried. The Meshech Chachma understands the Talmud (Sotah 36a) to say that we were denied a second miraculous deliverance because of the sins, namely because of our acculturation and lack of proper insulations. In the galus the Jew must strengthen his resolve and commitment especially to the siyagim, i.e. to those laws that assure and insure our uniqueness and individuality amongst the nations.

This teaching is so essential today. In yesteryear, the Jew living amongst the nations had to be on guard from actively going and visiting their forums of entertainment. Such a visit required, however, a deliberate and conscious effort on his part; he had to seek out this foreign set of values and morality. Today, with the

internet and Blackberry almost appended to one's body, it is most difficult and challenging to avoid surfing in foreign and forbidden sites. Moreover, one mistaken inadvertent click can catapult a person "out of his home" and environment.

"No man shall leave the entrance of his house until the morning" is understood by Rav Hirsch zt"l to prevent the mob mentality from influencing the fledgling Jewish nation to retaliate against its former masters. In addition, the pasuk teaches us how we are to learn from the past and realize that our homes are to be fortified with Torah, Jewish values, Jewish music, love and concern, thereby preparing us for the dawn of our ultimate deliverance. Now more than ever, the teaching of Anshei Knesses Hagedolah, (Avos 1:1) "asu seyag la-torah - make a fence for the Torah" is crucial for our survival.

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Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshat Bo

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

"Creature Feeling"

Our tradition teaches us to avoid using the divine name. We are instructed not to pronounce it in vain, and not to refer to it directly in writing. Some permit the name to be spelled out in languages other than Hebrew, whereas I personally follow the stricter opinion and use other terms to designate the deity.

Thus, in these columns I typically refer to "The Lord;" or to "The Almighty;" to "The Holy One Blessed Be He;" or to "The Master of the Universe." The most common substitute for the divine name, in both speech and writing, is simply Hashem, "The Name".

I was privileged to have known all four of my grandparents, as well as one great-grandmother, my maternal grandmother's mother. Most of them, especially the women, had entirely different appellations for the divine One. Some referred to Him as "Zisse Tate in Himmel", that is, "Sweet Father in Heaven"; others as "the Merciful One" or as "the One Above". With one exception, my grandparents and great-grandmother were simple Jews, and certainly not theologians. The names they used to refer to the Almighty where the names given to Him by the common folk back in the old country, Eastern Europe.

The exception was my paternal grandfather, Reb Chaim Yitzchak, who was an erudite Talmud scholar, who studied Torah literally day and night for all of his 80 years. He was a student of one of the great sages of the early 20th century, Rabbi Sholom Schwadron, known as the Berzhaner Rav. He not only had a different designation for the deity, but he had a profound rationale for why he chose it.

The Yiddish term he used was "der Bashefer", or, in English, "the Creator", and his reason was directly related to this week's Torah portion, Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16).

I cannot mention this grandfather's name without describing my relationship with him. First of all, although his preferred language was Yiddish, my sisters and I called him "Grandpa". Although he did not live with us, he visited us frequently for weeks at a time. I especially remember an entire summer, soon

after I was bar mitzvah, which he spent with us, and during which I was his roommate and study partner.

Invariably, Grandpa would spend almost all of his time with us studying Torah. He would usually repair to the Beit Midrash, or study hall, of the local synagogue, and somehow convince the custodian to lend him the keys so that he would have constant access to the quiet of the library and to its sacred books.

In the early years of his visits he would isolate himself in the synagogue library and we would see him only for meals and when he prepared to go to bed at night. He would wake up and return to the synagogue long before any of us was awake in the morning.

I vividly remember the day when I was about nine years old and he invited me to awaken early the next morning to accompany him. I was excited by the prospect of leaving home when it was still dark outside, although I must confess that I was not equally excited by the prospect of several hours of intense study.

I did accompany him that next morning, and we did study quite intensely. I will never forget that Torah session and the text we studied together. He began by reminding me that the upcoming Torah portion of the week was Parshat Bo. Then he asked me to name the second most important rabbinic Bible commentary after that of Rashi. As a fourth grader, I was totally unaware of any Bible commentary other than that of Rashi.

He then introduced me to Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, or Nachmanides. He briefly narrated Ramban's life story: a rabbi and doctor in Spain, a great debater who argued with, and bested, Christian theologians in the presence of the King of Spain, and who eventually had to flee Spain to the land of Israel where he died. He also taught me that Ramban considered living in Israel to be a great mitzvah.

"One day," he promised, "I will teach you the poem he wrote when he first beheld the ruins of Jerusalem. But today I want to teach you what I think is the most important passage in all of this great man's writings. And I want you to promise me that you will review this passage every year when Parshat Bo comes around."

In those days, nine-year-olds did not challenge their grandparents, and so I unhesitatingly promised that I would do so. He uttered the formula "Bli Neder", "without a vow", so that my childish commitment would not have the full force of a vow, and then began to read the passage.

Ramban comments at length on the importance of the story of the Exodus, and the miraculous release of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. He stresses that by remembering the Exodus from Egypt we assert our belief in the omnipotence of the Almighty. He goes on to say that it is because of the supreme importance of the Exodus that so many divine commandments were issued to assure that we will remember it for all generations.

Then Grandpa's voice rose a notch or two as he slowly quoted these words: "A person who purchases a mezuzah for one mere 'zuz' and affixes it to his door has already proclaimed that the world has a Creator who is all-knowing and provident, who communicates through prophecy, and who benefits those who do His will..."

He looked at me lovingly at that point and asked, "Do you see now what even a small mitzvah like mezuzah really signifies?"

I nodded my head in assent. He continued reading: "The purpose of all commandments is to instill in us belief in the Lord and

gratitude to Him for creating us... The intent of raising our voices in prayer and the purpose of synagogues and congregational prayer is just so that there will be a place for all the sons of Adam to assemble and proclaim to the Almighty who created them, "briyotecha anachnu, we are your creatures!"

"That is why," he clarified. "I always refer to Him as "der Bashefer", "the Creator."

Grandpa must have been satisfied that I understood the message of that pre-dawn lesson. Whenever we subsequently met during the next more than 20 years he would say to me in Yiddish, "Vie azoy Sagt der Ramban? How does Ramban put it?" And I unfailingly responded "Briyotecha anachnu, we are Your creatures."

A footnote: many years later, and with some trepidation, I shared with Grandpa that I had been reading the philosophical works of a German theologian named Schleiermacher, who defined the essence of religion as "kreaturgefuhl", a feeling of "creature-ness". Grandpa was not surprised. He smiled, and urged me to read the passage we studied together that morning very carefully.

"You will note," he said, "that Ramban does not say 'a place for all the sons of Israel to assemble', but rather 'a place for all the sons of Adam to assemble'. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that 'My house will be a house of prayer for all nations.'" (Isaiah 56:7)

By whatever name we know Him all He wants from all of us children of Adam is that we feel and acknowledge that we are His creatures.

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Necessity of Asking Questions

It is no accident that parshat Bo, the section that deals with the culminating plagues and the exodus, should turn three times to the subject of children and the duty of parents to educate them. As Jews we believe that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilization you need education. Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted. Unless parents hand on their memories and ideals to the next generation – the story of how they won their freedom and the battles they had to fight along the way – the long journey falters and we lose our way.

What is fascinating, though, is the way the Torah emphasizes the fact that children must ask questions. Two of the three passages in our parsha speak of this:

And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'" (Ex. 12: 26-27)

In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Ex. 13: 14)

There is another passage later in the Torah that also speaks of question asked by a child:

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in

Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. (Deut. 6: 20-21)

The other passage in today's parsha, the only one that does not mention a question, is:

On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13: 8)

These four passages have become famous because of their appearance in Haggadah on Pesach. They are the four children: one wise, one wicked or rebellious, one simple and "one who does not know how to ask." Reading them together the sages came to the conclusion that [1] children should ask questions, [2] the Pesach narrative must be constructed in response to, and begin with, questions asked by a child, [3] it is the duty of a parent to encourage his or her children to ask questions, and the child who does not yet know how to ask should be taught to ask.

There is nothing natural about this at all. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. "Children should be seen, not heard," goes the old English proverb. "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord," says a famous Christian text. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" asked Abraham. "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?" asked Moses. "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" asked Jeremiah. The book of Job is largely constructed out of questions, and God's answer consists of four chapters of yet deeper questions: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Can you catch Leviathan with a hook? ... Will it make an agreement with you and let you take it as your slave for life?"

In yeshiva the highest accolade is to ask a good question: Du fregst a gutte kashe. Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a deeply religious psychiatrist, tells of how when he was young, his teacher would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English, he would say, "You right! You 100 procent right! Now I show you where you wrong."

Isadore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to ask: 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist."

Judaism is not a religion of blind obedience. Indeed, astonishingly in a religion of 613 commandments, there is no Hebrew word that means "to obey." When Hebrew was revived as a living language in the nineteenth century, and there was need for a verb meaning "to obey," it had to be borrowed from the Aramaic: le-tsayet. Instead of a word meaning "to obey," the Torah uses the verb shema, untranslatable into English because it means [1] to listen, [2] to hear, [3] to understand, [4] to

internalise, and [5] to respond. Written into the very structure of Hebraic consciousness is the idea that our highest duty is to seek to understand the will of God, not just to obey blindly. Tennyson's verse, "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die," is as far from a Jewish mindset as it is possible to be.

Why? Because we believe that intelligence is God's greatest gift to humanity. Rashi understands the phrase that God made man "in His image, after His likeness," to mean that God gave us the ability "to understand and discern." The very first of our requests in the weekday Amidah is for "knowledge, understanding and discernment." One of the most breathtakingly bold of the rabbis' institutions was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own. They thanked God for it. How far this is from the narrow-mindedness than has so often demeaned and diminished religions, past and present.

The historian Paul Johnson once wrote that rabbinic Judaism was "an ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals." Much of that had, and still has, to do with the absolute priority Jews have always placed on education, schools, the bet midrash, religious study as an act even higher than prayer, learning as a lifelong engagement, and teaching as the highest vocation of the religious life.

But much too has to do with how one studies and how we teach our children. The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history – just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of God. Hand on the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyze, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to know and to teach this to our children, that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. As I write, we don't yet know whether the Higgs' boson exists. Darwin never knew what a gene was. Even the great Newton, founder of modern science, understood how little he understood, and put it beautifully: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honoured what Maimonides called the "active intellect" and saw it as the gift of God. No faith has honoured human intelligence more.

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Bo: The Birth of a Nation

"This is how you must eat [the Passover offering]: with your waist belted, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you must eat it in chipazon - in haste." (Ex. 12:11)

The word chipazon is an unusual word; in the entire Bible it appears only three times. Twice it is used to describe the haste of the Israelites when leaving Egypt. Why did they need to be ready to leave at a moment's notice?

According to the Midrash, there were in fact three parties who were in haste. The Egyptians, who were afraid that they would all die from the plagues, wanted the Israelite slaves to leave as quickly as possible. The Israelites were in a hurry, lest Pharaoh change his mind once again and refuse to let them leave.

But there was a third party in a rush. The Midrash also speaks of the chipazon of the Shechinah. Why was God in a hurry?

A Hasty Redemption

The redemption from Egypt needed to be fast, like the swift release of an arrow. Here was a group of slaves who had almost completely forgotten the greatness of their inner soul, a treasured gift from their forefathers, holy princes in the land. With a sudden push of God's hand, a great people full of courage and nobility of spirit, unlike any nation the world had ever seen, was born. This was the dramatic birth "of a nation from the midst of another nation" on the stage of human history.

The meteoric exodus from Egypt with wonders and miracles was critical, to protect this new nation from the dark confusion of world-wide paganism. The Jewish people needed to be decisively extracted from the idolatrous Egyptian milieu in which they had lived for centuries, so that they would be free to raise the banner of pure faith and enlightenment.

The Future Redemption

The word chipazon appears a third time in the Bible - in Isaiah's beautiful description of the future redemption. Unlike the Exodus from Egypt,

"You will not leave with haste - chipazon - or go in flight; for the Eternal will go before you, and your rear guard will be the God of Israel." (52:12)

Unlike the miraculous upheaval that brought about the sudden birth of the Jewish people, the future redemption is a gradual process, advancing with slow, progressive steps.

Why will the future redemption be so different from the redemption from Egypt?

In Egypt, the Hebrew slaves were little different from their idolatrous neighbors. Their redemption required a supernatural intervention, a Divine rescue from above. But the future redemption will take place within the laws of nature. It emanates from the stirring of the human heart, *itre'uta de-letata* - an awakening from below. The Jewish people rises from its exilic slumber, returns to its homeland, regains its independence, rebuilds its forests and cities, defends itself from enemies who would destroy it, recreates its centers of Torah, and so on. Step by step, without overriding the laws of nature, so that even the *ba'al ha-ness*, the beneficiary of the miracle, is unaware of the miracle.

Unlike the dramatic exodus from Egypt, the future redemption is not an escape from the world and its influences. Over the centuries, we have succeeded in illuminating many aspects that were full of darkness. Our influence has refined the world on

many levels. The impact of our Torah and lifestyle, which we guarded with dedication and self-sacrifice throughout the generations, have served as bright stars of enlightenment for many nations.

The goals of the future redemption are twofold. First - to complete the enterprise of spreading our light throughout the world. This light needs to be projected in its pure, pristine form, cleansed from the dregs that have accumulated from centuries of negative influences. The second goal is to purify ourselves from those foreign tendencies that we have absorbed through our contact with the nations during our lengthy exile.

When we will stand once again, strong and independent on the majestic heights of our land, ready to reach our spiritual potential - only then will the nations be able to see our light.

But we must draw upon the heritage of our redemption from Egypt and miraculous birth as the people of Israel. Then our future redemption that will be not in haste, but will grow steadily, *kim'a kim'a*, like the ever-spreading light of the morning sun.

(Adapted from Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah vol. I. p. 164)

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Weekly Halacha by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Visiting a Church or a Mosque

Question: Is it permitted to visit or tour a church or a mosque?

Discussion: It is clearly prohibited to enter a house of *avodah zarah*. The Mishnah¹ prohibits one from even entering a city in which *avodah zarah* is present. Since it is impossible for us, who live in exile, to adhere to this prohibition, we are considered *anusim*—under duress—in this regard. Entering an actual house of *avodah zarah*, however, is clearly prohibited.²

What remains to be clarified, however, is whether or not a church or a mosque is a house of *avodah zarah*. The *poskim* are not uniform in their classification of Christians as idol-worshippers. Although the Rambam rules unequivocally that Christians are idol-worshippers,³ other *Rishonim*⁴ are more tentative. Their view is based on the assumption that non-Jews are considered idol-worshippers only if they totally reject the existence of G-d. Christianity, however, combines the belief in G-d with other idolatrous and alien beliefs. Such a theology is called *avodah zarah b'shituf* (in combination). Some *poskim* rule that *avodah zarah b'shituf* is not considered full-fledged *avodah zarah*,⁵ while others maintain that it is.⁶

Moreover, there is a view⁷ that gentiles nowadays cannot be considered idol-worshippers since they are merely following in the tradition of their parents (without actually worshipping idols).

Practically speaking, however, the vast majority of the *poskim* agree that Christianity is considered *avodah zarah* and a Jew is forbidden to enter a church.⁸ The following reasons are offered:

* Most *poskim* consider Christianity to be *avodah zarah*.⁹

* Even if *avodah zarah b'shituf* is permitted, it is only permitted for a non-Jew. For a Jew, however, there is no difference

between avodah zarah and avodah zarah b'shituf.¹⁰ For him, therefore, a church is considered a house of avodah zarah.

* The view of the Ran (Sanhedrin 61b) is that the belief in any religion except Judaism constitutes avodah zarah. He says the following: "...even the Christian saints, and even the...leader of the Ishmaelites, even though their followers do not consider them gods, nevertheless, since they bow to them to acknowledge that they are human incarnation of their divinities, they all have the halachic status of avodah zarah..."

* Even if present-day gentiles do not worship idols, nevertheless their churches are considered houses of idol worship, since all the services conducted therein are performed in the name of avodah zarah.¹¹

Regarding Islam, however, most poskim follow the opinion of the Rambam¹² that it is not considered avodah zarah.¹³ Hence they do not expressly forbid entering a mosque.¹⁴ Other poskim forbid entering a mosque as well.¹⁵ All agree that unless there is a compelling reason to do so, mosques are off limits for any G-d-fearing Jew.

It goes without saying that the houses of worship of all other heathen religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. are considered avodah zarah and are off-limits at all times.

Question: Is one allowed to cut through the parking lot of a church?

Discussion: While church services are being held, it is clearly forbidden to enter the church's parking lot because it may seem to a bystander that one is entering the parking lot in order to enter the church.

When church services are not being held, it is permitted to cut through the church's parking lot. Although the poskim refer to a middas chasidus (an act of piety) not to enter a courtyard of a church, nevertheless, if the shortest route available is through the church's parking lot, it is permitted and the middas chasidus does not apply.¹⁶

1 Avodah Zarah 11b.

2 Rambam, Peirush ha-Mishnayos, Avodah Zarah 1:3. Shach, Y.D. 149:1. See also Y.D. 150:1.

3 Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 11:7. The line in the Rambam referring to Christians was censored. It appears in its entirety, however, in the Frankel edition of the Rambam. See also Rambam Hilchos Avodah Zarah 9:4, and Hilchos Teshuvah 3:8 for a similar ruling.

4 Tosafos, Sanhedrin 63b in the name of Rabbeinu Tam; Meiri, Avodah Zarah 2a and 6b.

5 Rama, O.C. 156 according to Pischei Teshuvah, Y.D. 147:2; Mor u'Ketziyah 224; Sho'el u'Meishiv, Tanina 1:51; Seder Mishnah, Yesodei ha-Torah 1:7.

6 Noda b'Yehudah, Tanina, Y.D. 148; Sha'ar Efrayim 24, quoting the Chelkas Mechokek; Peri Megadim, Y.D. 65:45; Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, O.C. 84. See Mishnah Berurah 304:4.

7 See Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 148:12 and Teshuvos Yehudah Ya'aleh, Y.D. 170.

8 Teshuvos Peri ha-Sadeh 2:4; Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:129-6.

9 Minchas Elazar 1:53-3; Yechaveh Da'as 4:45. See entire list in Yayin Malchus, pgs. 234-237

10 Binyan Tziyon 1:63.

11 Darchei Teshuvah 150:2; Tzitz Eliezer 14:91, quoting Rav C. Palagi.

12 Hilchos Ma'achalos Assuros 11:7.

13 Y.D. 124:6 and Taz 4 and Shach 12. See Ben Ish Chai, Parashas Balak.

14 See Avnei Yashfei 1:153 who quotes Rav Y.S. Elyashiv as ruling that it is not prohibited to enter a mosque.

15 Tzitz Eliezer 14:91; 18:47, based on the previously-mentioned view of the Ran. See also Meiri, Avodah Zarah 57a who quotes Chachmei Sefarad as ruling that Islam is avodah zarah.

16 Entire paragraph based on Rama, Y.D. 149:2. See also Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:129-6.

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What are the basic rules of the Jewish calendar?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Thirty Days has September, April, June, November, Tishrei, Shvat, Nissan, Sivan, Av and sometimes Cheshvan¹ and Kislev. Yet a reading of Mishnah Rosh Hashanah implies that whether a month has 29 days or 30 depends on when the witnesses saw the new moon and testified in Beis Din early enough to declare the thirtieth day Rosh Chodesh. In addition, the Gemara² notes that Elul could be thirty days long, something that cannot happen in our calendar. How did our empirical calendar become so rigid and predictable in advance? Come with me as we explore the history and foundations of the Jewish calendar!

The Torah (Shemos 12:2) commands the main Beis Din of the Jewish people, or a Beis Din specially appointed by them, to declare Rosh Chodesh upon accepting the testimony of witnesses who observed the new moon (Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh 1:1, 7; 5:1). The purpose of having eyewitnesses was not to notify the Beis Din of its occurrence; the Beis Din had extensive knowledge of astronomy and already knew exactly when and where the new moon would appear and what size and shape it would have (Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh 2:4; Ritva on the Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 18a). The moon's location and speed is constantly influenced by many factors, but the wise scholars of the tribe of Yissachar calculated where and when it would appear.

The Molad

As the moon orbits earth, we on earth observe it as passing through its various phases, from the very smallest crescent until full moon, and then shrinking until it disappears completely. This monthly cycle occurs because the moon has no light of its own, and only reflects sunlight back to earth. As the moon travels around the earth, the angle at which it reflects light changes. This evidences itself in the moon's changing phases. When the moon is on the side of the earth away from the sun, we see the full moon, because it is now at an angle whereby the entire side is reflecting light to us. However, when the moon is on the side of earth nearest the sun, we see no reflection of its light at all, and that is the point of every month when the moon disappears from earthly view. The molad is the point at which the moon crosses the plane between the earth and the sun, which means it is the beginning of a new cycle, called in English the new moon and in technical jargon the point of conjunction.

From the time of the actual molad you can calculate when the moon will become visible. Chazal always kept secret how one

can predict when the new moon was to appear so as to avoid false witnesses abusing the knowledge of this information (Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh, 11:4).

The purpose of having eyewitnesses was not to notify the Beis Din of its occurrence; rather, the Torah required the Beis Din to wait for witnesses to determine whether the 30th day (of the previous month) would be the last day of the old month or the first day of a new month. If no witnesses to the new moon testified on the 30th day, then the new month does not begin until the 31st day, regardless of the astronomic calculations (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 24a). Thus, prior to the establishment of our current "permanent" calendar, any month could be either 29 or 30 days, dependent on when the new moon appeared and whether witnesses arrived in Beis Din to testify about this phenomenon.

By the way, we should be aware that the above description follows the opinion of the Rambam, that the preferred and original mitzvah is to declare Rosh Chodesh based on the testimony of witnesses. However, there are several early authorities, including Rav Saadyah Gaon and Rabbeinu Chananel, who hold that the primary mitzvah is to declare Rosh Chodesh on the basis of the calculations, and that use of witnesses was implemented because of certain circumstantial issues.

According to either approach, the calendar printers could not go to press until the Beis Din had declared Rosh Chodesh, which probably explains why calendar manufacture in those times was a difficult business in which to turn a profit. Perhaps this is why organizations mailed out so few fundraising calendars in the days of Chazal!

There is another commandment of the Torah – that Pesach must always occur in the Spring (Devarim 16:1). This seemingly innocuous obligation actually requires considerable manipulation of the calendar, since the months, derived from the word moon, are determined by the length of time from one new moon to the next, which is a bit more than 29 1/2 days. However, the year and its seasons are determined by the relative location of the sun to the earth, which is a bit less than 365 1/4 days. By requiring Pesach to always be in the spring, the Torah required that the calendar could not be exclusively twelve lunar months, since this would result in Pesach wandering its way through the solar year and occurring in all seasons.³

Among contemporary calendars, most make no attempt to accommodate the solar year and the lunar month. What we refer to as the common secular calendar, or the Gregorian calendar, is completely based on the sun. Although the year is broken into months, the use of the word "months" is borrowed from its original meaning and has been significantly changed since the months have no relationship to any cycle of the moon. Most of the secular months have 31 days, while the lunar cycle is only about 29 1/2 days, and even those secular months that have 30 days do not relate to any phase or change in the moon. Similarly, the length of February as a month of either 28 or 29 days has nothing to do with the moon. Thus, although the word month should correspond to the moon, the Western calendar is purely a solar one, with a borrowed unit "month" given a meaning that distorts its origins.

The Moslem calendar is purely a lunar calendar of twelve lunar months, some 29 days and some 30, but has no relationship to the solar year. In truth, a pure lunar calendar has no real "year," since

a year is based on the relative locations of the sun and the earth and the resultant seasons, and the Moslem year completely ignores seasons. The word "year" is used in the Moslem sense only as a basis for counting longer periods of time, but has no relationship to the sun. Thus the Moslem "year" is only 354 or 355 days long -- almost 11 days shorter than a true solar year. Therefore, a Moslem who tells you that he is 65 years old is really closer to 63 according to a solar year count. He has counted 65 years that are at least ten days shorter. I trust that Guinness takes these factors into account when computing longevity, and insurance companies realize this when calculating actuarial tables.

To review: the Moslem calendar accurately tracks the moon and the months, but has no relationship to a true year, and the Western secular calendar is fairly accurate at tracking the year and its seasons, but has no relationship to the moon and its phases.

It is noteworthy that although the Moslem "year" does not correspond at all to a solar or western year, it closely corresponds to our Jewish year in a "common" year which is only twelve months long, and the Moslem month follows closely the Jewish calendar month. (We will soon explain why there is sometimes a discrepancy of a day or two.) Thus, for three years recently, Ramadan, the Moslem holy month, corresponded to our month of Elul, although this year Ramadan falls in Av. It is accurate to say that the Moslem year "wanders" its way through the seasons as it takes 33 years until a specific month returns to the same corresponding time in the solar year, and in the interim the month has visited each of the other seasons for several consecutive years. Thus, Ramadan will not coincide with Elul again this generation, but falls in Av for three years, with Tamuz for two years, and then with Sivan, etc.

However, when Hashem commanded us to create a calendar, He insisted that we use the moon to define the months, and yet also keep our months in sync with the seasons, which are dependent on the sun; to determine the dates of the Yomim Tovim. The only way to do this is to use the Jewish calendar method of occasionally adding months – thereby creating 13 month years, which we call "leap years," to offset the almost 11 day difference between twelve lunar months and a solar year. The result of this calendar is that although each date does not fall exactly on the same "solar date" every year, it falls within a fairly close range relative to the solar year.

Who determined which year has thirteen months?

The original system was that the main Beis Din (also known as the Sanhedrin) appointed a smaller special Beis Din to determine whether the year should have an extra month added. This special Beis Din took into consideration:

- 1) Astronomical data, such as: When Pesach will fall out relative to the vernal equinox (the Spring day on which day and night are closest to being equal in length).
- 2) Agricultural data, such as: How ripe is the barley? How large are the newborn lambs and pigeons?
- 3) Weather: Is the rainy season drawing to a close? Is it a famine year?
- 4) Convenience – or more specifically, the halachic inconvenience of creating a leap year: Shemittah was

never made into a leap year, and the year before shemittah usually was.

5) Infrastructure, such as: In what condition were the highways and bridges.

All of these points influenced whether the thirteenth month, the extra Adar, would be added.⁴ When this system was in place, which was from the time of Moshe and Yehoshua until almost three hundred years after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the main Beis Din sent written messages notifying outlying communities of the decision to create a leap year and the reasons for their decision.⁵

By the way, after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, the main Beis Din was not located in Yerushalayim, but wherever the Nasi of the Jewish people resided, as long as it was in Eretz Yisrael. This included several other communities at various times of Jewish history, including Teverya, Yavneh, and Shafraam.⁶ Indeed, during this period sometimes the special Beis Din met outside the land of Israel -- should the head of the Beis Din be in the Diaspora and there be no one of his stature remaining in Eretz Yisrael.⁷

This explains how the calendar is intended to be calculated. I have not yet explained why and how our current calendar came to be. This will be discussed in a future article.

1 Although the correct name of the month is Marcheshvan, we will follow the colloquial use of calling it Cheshvan.

2 Rosh Hashanah 19b, 20a

3 Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh 4:1

4 Sanhedrin 11a- 12a

5 Sanhedrin 11b; Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh 4:17

6 Rosh Hashanah 31b

7 Berachos 63a; Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh 1:8

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