

B'S'D'

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON PARSHAS VAYAKHEL - 5757

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neustadt@torah.org WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5757 COPYRIGHT  
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### SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS VAYAKHEL

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day (35:3)  
COOKING CHOLENT ON SHABBOS

Of all of the thirty-nine forbidden melachos of Shabbos, the Torah mentions only one explicitly: Do not kindle a fire. This prohibition is singled out to disabuse us of the notion that cooking may be permitted on Shabbos since, after all, Shabbos is a day of oneg, pleasure(1). In fact, as we know, regular cooking is a forbidden melachah, and anything akin to cooking which is permitted on Shabbos is governed by complex halachos, with modern technology only increasing their complexity. As cholent is the classic example of a food which is partially cooked on Shabbos, we will outline the relevant halachos:

There are three possible methods of preparing cholent for Shabbos: on top of the stove, inside the oven and in a crockpot(2), and all three are susceptible to the following Shabbos violations: 1.The Biblical prohibition of cooking on Shabbos; 2.The rabbinical prohibition of putting food on a heat source before Shabbos and leaving it on during Shabbos. The reason for this ordinance is to prevent one from inadvertently "stoking the coals," or its modern equivalent, adjusting the knobs to raise the temperature. 3.The rabbinical prohibition of returning [on Shabbos] food to a heat source, since then, too, one would be inclined to adjust the temperature. In addition, this is prohibited because it appears to be "cooking". To avoid these potential violations, the following guidelines must be followed:

#### ON TOP OF THE STOVE:

**On Friday:** Although not halachically mandated, it has become customary that the fire is covered by a blech, even if the cholent is already cooked completely before sunset(3). If cholent is less than half-cooked [or under extenuating circumstances it may be only a third cooked], a blech is halachically required. Some poskim recommend covering the knobs which control the flame in addition to a blech(4), while other poskim require it(5). **On Shabbos:** To remove a cholent pot from the fire with the intention of putting it right back on, e.g., to add water to it or to serve it at a kiddush before a meal, the following conditions must be met: 1. The fire [and knobs(6)] must be covered with a blech [a blech may be placed over the fire on Shabbos(7)]; 2. The cholent must be completely cooked and still warm when returned to the flame; 3. L'chatchillah, one should not rest the cholent pot on any surface.

#### INSIDE THE OVEN

**On Friday:** It is advisable that cholent be completely cooked before Shabbos begins. If it was not, or b'dieved, as long as the cholent is half cooked [or under extenuating circumstances it may be a third cooked], it may be left in the oven. If the cholent is not cooked to even this extent, then the cholent may not be left inside the oven - unless an oven insert is placed inside it.

**On Shabbos:** In the opinion of many poskim, if cholent was removed from inside the oven it may not be returned to the oven - unless there is an oven insert inside(8). A minority opinion holds that if the stove knobs are covered or removed, then the cholent may be returned to the oven even without an insert, if the conditions listed above are met(9).

#### CROCKPOT

**On Friday:** It is advisable that cholent be completely cooked before Shabbos begins. If it was not, or b'dieved, as long as the cholent is half cooked [or under extenuating circumstances it may be a third cooked], the cholent may remain in the crockpot and continue cooking. If the cholent is not cooked to even this extent, then the cholent may be left in the crockpot only if heavy duty silver foil covers the heating element (base) of the crockpot(10) and the control knobs are covered(11).

**On Shabbos:** Cholent may be taken off the heating element and returned to the crockpot later on Shabbos provided that the conditions listed above are met. The heating element of the crockpot must be covered with aluminum foil(12.)

**ADDING WATER TO CHOLENT** Boiling water may be added to cholent under certain circumstances - if the cholent is completely cooked and the source of heat is covered with a blech or aluminum foil. Since there are several permissible methods of adding boiling water to cholent, we will list them in order of their halachic preference:

Where should the cholent be when the water is added? 1. Removed from the heat source and held in the air, not resting on any surface at all(13); 2. Removed from the heat source and balanced partially on a surface(14); 3. Removed from the heat source and placed on a surface without releasing one's grip on the pot(15); 4. Removed from the heat source and shifted over to an area of the blech that is still hot(16); 5. On the heat source itself. This method should be utilized only as a last resort when the other options are not available(17). The water must be poured in slowly and gently.

How Should The Water Be Transferred From The Kettle or Urn To The

Cholent Pot? 1. Directly from the urn to the pot. 2. Insert a [parve] ladle into the urn [leave it in for several seconds(18)] and then ladle the water into the pot(19). Either of these methods is preferred. 3. Pour the water into a cup and empty immediately into the pot(20). This should be done only as a last resort when other options are not available, since some poskim do not approve of this method(21).

General notes concerning adding water to the cholent: Water from a Shabbos urn often does not reach the boiling point. When added to the boiling cholent, however, the water will be boiled - a possible violation of the Biblical prohibition of cooking(22). One must be sure that the temperature of the water in the urn reaches 212 degrees(23), or at the very least 175 degrees(24), or else the water may not be added. [If, however, the water had previously reached 212 or 175 degrees, it is permissible to pour it into the cholent even though it has cooled off a bit(25).] When pouring directly from an urn into the pot, one must be extremely careful not to make the kettle or urn fleishig from the steam which rises from the cholent. When uncovering the cholent pot, first allow the steam to escape before bringing the urn next to the pot(26). L'chatchillah, water should be added to the cholent before it has completely dried out, since some poskim hold that a dried out cholent is considered to be roasted, tzli. If so, pouring water into the pot recooks this "roast", which is prohibited(27). Other poskim, however, hold that one need not be concerned about this issue(28). After the water is poured in, the pot cover should be replaced before the pot is returned to the fire, since some poskim(29) hold that one may not place a cover on a pot while its on the fire even if the item is completely cooked. Many other poskim are not particular about this(30).

FOOTNOTES: 1 Ramban 35:3. 2 This discussion will not address the problem of certain crockpots which may be prohibited to use because of the issue of hatmanah. See Weekly Discussion to Parshas Vaeschanan 5756 for a complete analysis of that issue. 3 The custom is based on the ruling of the Rama 253:1 according to the explanation of the Biur Halachah. See Chazon Ish OC 37:3 who disagrees and holds that a blech is not required when the cholent is completely cooked nor does it help when the cholent is not cooked. Most poskim do not agree with his view, see Kaf Hachayim 253:11; Igros Moshe OC 1:93; Tzitz Eliezer 7:15. 4 Igros Moshe OC 1:93; Be'er Moshe 7:3-4. 5 Harav Aharon Kotler (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos pg. 338); Shevet Halevi 1:93. 6 According to the various views quoted earlier. 7 Igros Moshe OC 1:93; 4:74-29; Minchas Shlomo 46; Shevet Halevi 1:91. 8 Igros Moshe OC 4:74-26; Minchas Yitzchok 3:28; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 89). 9 Harav Aharon Kotler (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos pg. 354); Shevet Halevi 3:48. 10 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 96; Otzros Hashabbos pg. 404). 11 According to the various views quoted earlier. 12 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 96; Otzros Hashabbos pg. 404). 13 This is the preferred halachic method but not always practical, particularly when only one person is available for the job. 14 Ruling of Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Shvus Yitzchok pg. 161) and Debreciner Rov (Am Hatorah vol. 2 # 1 pg. 13) that a pot held in this manner is not considered as having been "put down" and returning it to the fire is permissible. 15 Igros Moshe OC 4:74-33 rules that even when the pot is held this manner it is not considered as if it was "put down". Other poskim disagree, see Meleches Shabbos pg. 128. 16 Igros Moshe OC 4:74-12 (see also 4:61); Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 1: fn. 111); Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 78; Otzros Hashabbos pg. 405). In order to satisfy all views, it is best to place the pot on a place on the blech which is 160 degrees or more. If this is difficult, the pot may be placed on any hot area of the blech. 17 Although several poskim do not recommend this method (Harav S.Z. Auerbach at first permitted this but later hesitated - see Tikunim U'milluim pg. 1 and Meor Hashabbos pg. 455; Igros Moshe OC 4:74-13 also seems to prohibit this), Harav S. Y. Elyashiv rules that when no other possibility exists one can rely on this method, so long as the water is poured in slowly and gently (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 198). See also Ktzos Hashulchan (Badei Hashulchan 243:10) who is lenient. 18 Based on Mishnah Berurah 318:87. 19 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah pg. 6). 20

Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah pg. 6 and Tikunim U'milluim); Harav Shmuel Auerbach quotes the Steipler as permitting this (see haskamah to Masas Binyomin). 21 Minchas Yitzchok 6:20;10:18; Shevet Halevi 3:93-2; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 204-206); Zachor V'shamor (section 11 pg. 46). 22 In the view of many poskim, it is Biblically forbidden to boil water even if the water is already at the temperture of yad soledes bo - see Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 1: fn. 15 and fn. 96). 23 Minchas Yitzchok 10:28; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 142); Shevet Halevi 7:42-3. 24 Igros Moshe OC 4:74-1. The Shiur of 175 degrees is based on Igros Moshe YD 2:52. 25 Igros Moshe OC 4:74:1,13; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah pg. 13); Shevet Halevi 7:42-3. "Cooled off a bit" means that it is hot enough that one who wants a hot drink would consider it hot. 26 See YD 92:8 and Badei Hashulchan; Minchas Yitzchok 5:81;6:20; Meleches Shabbos pg. 98 27 Kinyan Torah 2:106; Tshuvos V'hanagos 2:173. 28 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah pg. 5); Meleches Shabbos pg. 99 29 Shvisas Hashabbos (Mevashel 26:81); Igros Moshe OC 4:74-10; Meleches Shabbos pg. 101. 30 Ktzos Hashulchan (Badei Hashulchan 124:10); Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah pg. 5); Harav S. Wosner (M'bais Levi 6); Tzitz Eliezer 7:15-4; Eimek Hateshuvah 42; Be'er Moshe 6:115. Weekly-Halachah, Copyright (c) 1997 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Project Genesis, Inc. The author, Rabbi Neustadt, is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos. The Weekly-Halachah Series is distributed L'zchus Hayeled Doniel Meir ben Hinda. Weekly sponsorships are available - please mail to jgross@torah.org . The series is distributed by the Harbotzas Torah Division of Congregation Shomre Shabbos, 1801 South Taylor Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118 HaRav Yisroel Grumer, Marah D'Asra This list is part of Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network.

Parsha Q&A - Vayakhel ohr@jer1.co.il (Ohr Somayach)  
This issue is sponsored by Herschel Kulefsky, Attorney at Law 15 Park Row, New York, NY 10038, 1-212-693-1671  
Parsha Questions 1. What three different words in this week's Parsha are spelled with the same four letters? 2. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People? 3. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbos written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan? 4. Why does the Torah single out the prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbos? 5. What function did the "Yisdos Hamishkan" serve? 6. What function did the "Bigdei Hasrad" serve? 7. What was unusual about the way the women spun the goat's wool? 8. Why were the Nesi'im last to contribute to the Mishkan? 9. Who was Chur's mother? 10. Who were the primary Mishkan-builders? 11. Why did Hashem choose people specifically from the tribes of Dan and Yehuda to build the Mishkan? 12. For what was the woven goat's-hair used? 13. What image was woven on the `Paroches'? 14. Why does the Torah credit Betzalel with the building of the Aron? 15. How many lamps did the Menorah have? 16. What was the Mizbach Haketores made of? 17. What was the Mizbach Ha'olah made of? 18. What does `nevu' mean? 19. The Kiyor was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt? 20. How did the Kiyor promote peace?  
Bonus QUESTION: "All the women whose hearts motivated them spun the goats (35:26)." "This was a special art, that they spun the wool while it was still connected to the goats" (Rashi) Why did the women spin the thread in this unusual way?  
I Did Not Know That! Moshe commanded: "Don't do any more work (melacha) for the sanctuary offering, and so the people stopped bringing." (36:6) This is the source for the halacha that carrying from a private domain to a public domain is a `melacha' -- a forbidden act on Shabbos. Moshe said "Don't do any more `melacha.' Therefore, `the people stopped bringing' items from their private homes to the public site of the sanctuary. Tosafos,

## Tractate Shabbos 96b

Recommended Reading List Ramban 35:1 Date of the Assembly 35:21  
Generosity and Inspiration 35:22 Female Leadership 38:8 Mirrors of Virtue  
Ibn Ezra 35:27 Gifts of the Princes 35:34 Learning and Teaching 38:8  
Mirrors of Devotion Sefer Hachinuch 114 Recess from Judgment

Answers to this Week's Questions All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated 1. 36:35, 37:6,19 - Paroches, Kapores and Kaftor. 2. 35:1 - The day after Yom Kippur. 3. 35:2 - To emphasize that the building of the Mishkan doesn't supersede the laws of Shabbos. 4. 35:3 - There are two different opinions: a) To teach that igniting a fire on Shabbos is less severe than the other `melachos.' b) To teach that each melacha is a separate violation, requiring its own separate atonement. 5. 35:18 - They kept the curtains from blowing in the wind. 6. 35:19 - They covered the Aron, Shulchan, Menorah, and the Mizbechos during transport. 7. 35:26 - It was spun directly from off of the backs of the goats. 8. 35:27 - The Nesi'im wanted to let the people contribute first, so they could then contribute whatever was missing. 9. 35:30 - Miriam. 10. 35:30, 35:34 - Betzalel ben Uri from the tribe of Yehuda; Oholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan. 11. 35:34 - Hashem picked from the tribe of Dan, an undistinguished tribe in relation to the tribe of Yehuda, to show that all are equal in front of Hashem. 12. 36:14 - It was made into curtains to be draped over the Mishkan. 13. 36:35 - Keruvim. (See Rashi 26:31). 14. 37:1 - Because he dedicated himself to its building more than anyone else. 15. 37:23 - Seven. 16. 37:25,26 - Wood covered with gold. 17. 38:1,2 - Wood covered with copper. 18. 38:7 - Hollow. 19. 38:8 - The righteous women used the mirrors to arouse the affections of their husbands who were weary from slave labor. This was responsible for the growth of the Jewish people. 20. 38:8 - Its waters allowed someone accused of adultery to prove her innocence.

Bonus ANSWER: All the vessels and garments of the Mishkan needed to be guarded against ritual impurity. While still attached to the goat, however, the thread was immune to ritual impurity. This is because living animals can not contract ritual impurity. As a special precaution, the women spun the thread while it was still connected to the goats. That way, if the woman discovered that the thread accidentally contacted something impure, it will remain pure nevertheless, because it is still part of a live animal. Heard from Rabbi Betzalel Rudinsky  
Written and Compiled by Rabbi Reuven Subar General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman Production Design: Lev Seltzer (C) 1997 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

## Chassidic Dimension - Vayakhel (W-2 LIST Chabad-Lubavitch)

### "Hearts Moved to Bring"

The Torah reading of Vayakhel begins with Moshe relating G-d's command that the Jews donate for the construction of the Mishkan. Moshe states it thus: "Take from among yourselves an offering to G-d; whoever's heart moves him shall bring the G-dly offering." The commentators point to an apparent inconsistency in this verse: "Take from..." seems to imply that the offering was to be taken by force if necessary, while "whoever's heart moves him shall bring" indicates that it is to be given freely. The commentators answer that the verse refers to two categories of gifts. The beginning alludes to the half-shekel offering that was to be taken from each Jew, while the latter part speaks of the voluntary gifts brought for the construction of the Mishkan. We must, however, understand why the command as Moshe heard it speaks of "taking" -- "They shall take unto Me terumah"; "you shall take My Terumah"; "This is the terumah that you shall take" -- and makes no mention of "bringing," as Moshe did when he related the command to the Jewish people. The Mishkan served as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, for which reason it was known as the "Mishkan of Testimony," for the Divine

Presence that was revealed there served as testimony to the Jewish people that G-d had yielded to Moshe regarding their sin with the Golden Calf. The Jews emphasized their absolute contrition for the sin by giving their gold unstintingly for the construction of the Mishkan, to make up for their having given it for the construction of the Golden Calf. Their generosity thus reflected their great desire to have the Divine Presence reside in their midst -- the very antithesis of the sin of the Golden Calf. This is why the command regarding the gifts for the Mishkan, as given by G-d to Moshe, stresses only the aspect of "taking," while the verse in our Torah portion highlights the aspect of "giving" and "bringing." G-d's command to Moshe related to that which should be taken in by the Mishkan's treasurers, while the selfsame command, as related by Moshe, stressed the "giving" and "bringing" which underscored the Jewish people's heartfelt joy in making these contributions -- a feeling engendered by G-d's having forgiven them wholeheartedly and gladly for the sin of the Golden Calf. The nation's generosity was thus not the result of any command from above, and was of major significance not only with regard to being forgiven the sin of the Golden Calf, but even more importantly, for its contribution to the goal of having G-d reside within the Jewish people through His presence in the Mishkan. Although the Jews witnessed G-d in all His glory at Sinai, they nevertheless succumbed soon afterwards to the sin of the Golden Calf. How could this have happened? It was possible because the revelation at Sinai sprang strictly from above, i.e., the spiritual elevation brought about within the Jewish people did not result from their own service, but from G-d's self-revelation. It was thus possible that they would subsequently regress. That the Jews became fitting permanent vessels for G-dliness was a result of their wholehearted and joyous giving for the construction of the Mishkan. This resulted in a degree of permanent spiritual elevation, and brought about an eternal infusion of holiness into the physical materials with which the Mishkan was built. Based on Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XXVI, pp. 262-266

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Dvar Torah: Parshat Vayakhel/Shekalim 5757  
Rabbi Moshe Shulman  
PRIORITIES

This week we read the special portion of Parshat Shekalim. The purpose of the half-shekel tax, on the one hand, was to conduct a simple census, to count the people by their contributions rather than by counting individuals. On the other hand, it was also used as a head tax, each individual being assessed a particular amount. These half shekels were then used in the construction of the Tabernacle, and (later) the upkeep and funding of the Temple Service. The real question is why do we read Parshat Shekalim now, just before Rosh Chodesh Adar?

The Talmud records (Megillah 29a) that it was necessary to announce a yearly tax which would be utilised in the purchase of community sacrifices, starting from Nisan. In this way, responsibility for the community service of the Temple fell on every member of the Jewish people. This explanation does not fully satisfy the question, however. Why should this portion be read specifically before the month of Adar. The Talmud, therefore, further clarifies the relationship between the Shekels and Purim "It was known before He Who Spoke and Created the World that Haman would, in the future, weigh Shekels against the Jewish People. He therefore ordained that the Jews preempt his shekel with their shekel! (Megillah 13b) This too requires explanation. Even more puzzling is the relationship our Sages drew between this "head tax" and the sin of the Golden Calf. "What caused the tribes to need the "half shekel" as a redemption of their soul? The sin of the Golden Calf!!!" (Tanchuma, Ki Tissa, ch. 2) How does a "head tax" redeem the people from the sin of the Golden Calf? This is, perhaps, the meaning of the statement in the Jerusalem Talmud which compares the donations brought forth for the construction of the Tabernacle with those for the Golden Calf. For the building of the Tabernacle the Torah says: "All those of a generous

heart brought the donations", "kol nediv libo", whereas for the Golden Calf the Torah says: "and all the people pulled off their jewellery..., "va'yitparku kol ha'am..."

My grandfather, of blessed memory, R. Yechiel Michel Kossowsky, of Johannesburg, explained that this underscores the severity of the sin of the Golden Calf. Had their crime been only that they gave generously to the construction of the idol, it would not have been so terrible. What incriminated the people so badly was that when it came to donate towards the construction of the Tabernacle, the real House of G-d, when they were asked to give to true spiritual goals, there not "all the people" gave, but rather only those "of generous hearts". Evidently, some were generous, some were not! Inconsistency and hypocrisy were the real crimes. To the idol everyone gave, immediately, without hesitation. But - to the Tabernacle - there was hesitation and "justification". People began to think to themselves, "perhaps... perhaps not... maybe some others should give... perhaps it's not my responsibility! After all, I'm not the priest. I'm not even going to go to the Tabernacle!!!!..." The crime of the Golden Calf became magnified by comparison to how they gave to the Tabernacle! That was intolerable! We understand that that is part of human nature. People are always willing to spend generous sums for material benefits, physical pleasures, idols which are accompanied by "and the people ate and drank and arose to enjoy themselves..." But to donate for institutions of spiritual growth, for Tabernacles, Sanctuaries, and houses of study - that's a different story. There one has to be "generous" to give. Then only those who are, "nedivei lev", "generous in the heart" come forward. My grandfather further explained that that is why the Torah instituted the "head tax" of the half shekel for the construction of the Tabernacle, as well as the yearly purchase of the animals for the Temple service. For the "machatzit hashekel" every person gave the same, poor, rich, old or young. This "half shekel" was not meant to raise money as much as it was to teach the people a critical lesson in priorities!

Says the Torah: When it comes to building the Tabernacle let no one say "that is not my responsibility, I cannot partake." Everyone must participate, without exception, because it is the Tabernacle which is the foundation of our people. A half shekel for every person, without exception! Because we must learn that the Sanctuaries and Houses of learning are ALL our responsibilities. How can one claim, in good conscience, that physical luxuries and pleasures are more important or of a higher priority than spiritual growth? How can one wash their hands of the responsibility to provide for the spiritual future of our people? That is also the explanation of why our Sages connected this message to Purim. How much money has been spent, throughout history, by the Haman's and Hitler's to destroy us? How much money has been put into organisations of anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli terrorists? Says the Gemara: Haman offered Shekalim to destroy the Jews. How did the Jews respond? That's what Purim is all about: OUR RESPONSE! And what is our response? Certainly part of the response is Shekalim for public relations, and organizations which fight anti-Semitism. But our Sages saw a higher priority, a greater and far more important response. Our Sages saw the proper response being a "half shekel tax" to the tabernacle, a commitment of every single member of the Jewish people, together, accepting equal responsibility, strengthening the Sanctuary, strengthening the institutions of Jewish learning and Jewish commitment. Our Sages saw the proper response as the establishment, once and for all, of the true priorities of Judaism!

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayakhel ryfrand@torah.org (Rabbi Yissocher Frand) Mirrors Appropriate Component of Vessel Used to Sanctify Hands & Feet Toward the end of the parsha, the verse reads [38:8] "He made the Laver of copper and its base of copper, from the mirrors of the legions (haTzov'os) who massed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." The Kior was the basin in which the Kohanim washed their hands and feet every day

at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Moshe constructed the Kior from the 'mirrors of the legions.' Rash"i here relates a fascinating tradition from the Sages as to the nature of these mirrors: The women of the Jewish people donated their copper mirrors to the building fund of the Tabernacle. Moshe was hesitant to accept this gift. He felt that the object that the women stood in front of to fix their hair and to put on their lipstick was, perhaps, not appropriate to use in the Mishkan. He was about to reject them because he considered them 'made for the evil inclination.' G-d overruled Moshe. G-d said, "there is nothing more dear to Me than those mirrors; for with those mirrors the women were able to establish masses of legions in Egypt". When the husbands were out slaving away at the pyramids, they had no drive, no ambition, and no hope for the future. The women went and beautified themselves for their husbands in front of these mirrors and engaged their husbands in relations. As a result of that, there were masses of the Jewish nation. "Therefore," G-d said, "there is nothing more important to Me. Take those mirrors and make them part of the Kior."

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that it is particularly fitting and proper that they used these mirrors specifically for the Kior. The Kior was that vessel which was used to "sanctify their hands and feet." On a symbolic level, the idea of sanctifying one's hands and feet means the sanctification of one's actions. A person has the ability to infuse with holiness that which his hands and feet produce.

The Catholic religion insists that the sensual side of a person is inherently bad. It is a product of the 'Original Sin.' The Torah says "No! This is not true." There is no aspect of a human being that cannot be elevated, that cannot be infused with holiness. Eating can be for the sake of Heaven. Marital relations can be for the sake of Heaven. Everything can be holy. It depends what we make of it.

This is represented by the vessel which accomplishes "sanctification of hands and feet." It teaches that one can in fact make holy every single act of one's life -- one's work, one's play, one's eating, and one's marital life. Everything can be infused with holiness. The mirrors of those women represented that beautiful moment in Jewish history when women made themselves attractive and enticed their husbands entirely for the sake of Heaven. It is the sensual side of human beings on the highest level. So, G-d said, take those mirrors and put them in the vessel which teaches for all generations that it is possible to infuse every and any part of one's life with a higher level of sanctity.

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SICHOT - TORAH STUDY IN THE MODERN WORLD PART 1  
yhe@jer1.co.il (Yeshivat Har Etzion) (Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva  
summarized by students) ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT  
MIDRASH (VBM)

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A  
TORAH STUDY IN THE MODERN WORLD  
Summarized by Aviad Hacoen

Pt. 1

Torah study is the central focus of life at yeshiva. Despite this - or because of it - its pursuit raises many questions among the students. We believe that "God's covenant was sealed by means of the Oral Law" (Tanchuma Bereishit 58); nevertheless, no small number of students ask openly (together with others who sense the problem but keep it to themselves, or repress it), "There are so many serious problems in the world - problems of faith, of morality, of human suffering, the fate of Am Yisrael; can we really devote our whole day to the questions such as whether the principle of 'ha-peh she- asar' ('the mouth which prohibits is the mouth which

permits") falls under the category of 'migo' (a halachic principle of deduction) or whether it represents a special law of its own?"

There are those who seek answers to such questions. They read books, listen intently to talks by the rabbis and roshei yeshiva, and look for answers. Sometimes, during moments of frankness, a person finds himself reaching the conclusion that the subjects being studied at yeshiva no longer "speak to him," or "go over his head." Such a situation creates frustration and pangs of conscience.

I would like to say a few words on this topic. There is a well-known saying of the Ba'al Shem Tov regarding the verse (Tehillim 118), "Open for me the gates of righteousness, I shall enter them, I shall praise God. This is the gateway to God; the righteous shall enter it." The tzaddikim (righteous people) have the feeling that they are standing before locked gates, and they pray, "Open for me the gates of righteousness." The answer to them is, "This is the gateway to God; the righteous shall enter it" - in other words, this feeling, that you are standing outside the gates (and yearning to enter), is itself the gateway to God. It is natural to have doubts. Anyone who never has such doubts or such questions is either living on empty slogans or is the product of an education in which there are no questions and no thought. I was once talking to a Chabad chassid, one of the Rebbe's emissaries, and I asked him a question. He answered, "Why are you asking me? Does the bullet that is fired from a gun think for itself? It's the same with me. I was sent on a certain mission. There is someone else who does the thinking for me."

Indeed, for the person who knows how and wants to ask, only questioning will bring him to the correct path. He has to try to understand and to bring himself close to the Torah by means of those very doubts. If I were R. Levi-Yitzhak of Berditchev, I would say, "Master of the Universe: Rabbi Akiva Eiger and the Vilna Ga'on loved the Torah to the depths of their being, but what is surprising about that? Look, here there are dozens of people in their 20's who have no answer as to what is so special about an 'ox which gores a cow' and who nevertheless spend much time and effort studying these topics!"

R. Zerachia Halevi, the Ba'al HaMa'or, who wrote his commentary on the Rif at the young age of 19, was unique. R. Shlomo HaKohen of Vilna started his book of responsa, Reishit Bikkurim, with a collection of glosses which he wrote on the work of the great sage of the generation, the Misheknot Ya'akov, in which he asks the latter's forgiveness for the temerity of what he wrote at the age of 18. He was also one of a kind. These were unique personalities of their generation. What then can we say of ourselves? Can we really provide answers to such serious questions using the tools we've accumulated in twenty years?

Let me add that R. Haim Vital once asked his teacher, the holy Ari: "How can you say that my spiritual state is elevated? The lowliest person from one of the earlier generations would have been such a righteous person that I could never even reach his ankles!" The Ari answered him: "Know that spiritual greatness as pertaining to a person's deeds is measured only according to his epoch and his generation. A very small deed that is performed in a generation such as this is comparable to many great mitzvot performed in earlier generations. In our times the kelipa ("shell," a kabbalistic term referring to the materialistic, worldly covering which hides the spark of holiness) is immeasurably strong, and this was not the case in previous generations."

"According to his epoch and his generation." The holy Ari emphasized that everything is measured according to the era in which it takes place. And if in our times there are young people who invest all their energies in Torah study even though they don't have all the answers, that in itself is a great phenomenon!

R. Nachman of Breslov taught us a great truth. The Jerusalem Talmud, at the beginning of Massekhet Ta'anit (1:1, page 64a) states: "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: If someone should ask you 'Where is your God?', say to him 'In the great town in Rome.'"

"In the great town in Rome" - no more, no less. Rabbi Nachman of

Breslov explained: Sometimes a person declines spiritually to the point where he is able only to ask, "Where is God?" He can no longer find Him. Our sages are teaching this person, "Do you think you will find God somewhere else? Whichever place you are in - that's where you will find Him." That lowest level, represented by the "great town in Rome" - that is where you will find God; that is your starting point.

We are not able to "skip" generations. A person must be honest with himself. A grain of honesty and truth is worth more than anything else - not only in God's eyes, but also in terms of what it achieves. We may not allow ourselves to whitewash the truth. Today we are faced with big questions, and we have to pray that during the course of our lives we shall be worthy of having them answered fully. The main thing, as Rabbi Nachman said, is to start from wherever you are.

I shall say a few words about the value of Torah study in terms of the sublime nature of Torah. On the verse, "And they shall take a contribution for Me" (Shemot 25:1), the Midrash explains (Shemot Rabba 33):

"Is there such a thing as an object whose owner is sold together with it? God said to Israel: I sold you My Torah; I was sold, as it were, together with it, as it is written - 'and they shall take a contribution to me' - they will take Me. This may be compared to a king who had an only daughter. Another king came and took her as his wife. Then the latter wanted to return to his country, taking his new wife with him. The father said to him: This daughter whom I gave to you, is the only one I have. I cannot part from her. I also cannot tell you, 'Don't take her,' for she is your wife. So please do me the following kindness: every place that you go, make one chamber for me so that I can stay with you, for I cannot be separated from my daughter. In the same way, God said to Israel: I have given you the Torah. I cannot part from it. I also cannot tell you, 'Don't take it.' So wherever you go, make Me a house so that I may dwell in it, as it is written - 'And they shall make Me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell among them.'"

Indeed, the Midrash (Tanchuma Bereishit 58, 3) describes the Oral Law as being characterized by "darkness." The covenant was sealed by means of the Oral Law, which is difficult to study and to understand and which involves much effort and pain, which is compared to darkness. The Midrash Tanchuma further teaches that at Sinai, God had to force the nation to accept the Oral Torah by threatening them with destruction - even though regarding the Written Law they had declared "na'aseh ve-nishma" ("We shall do and we shall hear," indicating unconditional acceptance) - since the Oral Law is full of minute and demanding details which are "as strong as death and whose jealousy is as hard as She'ol."

From time to time attempts were made to respond in various ways to the types of questions mentioned above. Mussar, study of emuna, the "internal teachings of the Torah," mysticism, Chassidism. None of these succeeded in answering the questions.

Quoting Chazal, R. Chayim of Volozhin states (in his Nefesh HaChayim) that fear of Heaven is a good thing, and may be compared to a measure of chumtun (a preservative) surrounding a bundle of wheat. The measure of chumtun keeps the wheat from becoming rotten. He then adds: All this is true of a "measure" of chumtun, but if all your produce is chumtun - i.e., if you deal only with issues relating to fear of Heaven - then you actually have nothing in your hands.

Fear of Heaven assists in the task of learning Torah, but it is not a substitute for it. Historically, too - both on a "micro" and on a "macro" scale - it has been proven that without intensive Torah study, nothing else has any permanence. Any community which did not include Torah study - involvement in the disputes of Abaye and Rava - did not last.

I'll be quite honest with you. Rav Lichtenstein wrote a wonderful article entitled, "The Ideology of Hesder". (Hesder is an educational framework where students alternate periods of Torah study with periods of army service.) When I first thought of the hesder idea, many years ago - long before it became a reality - I didn't think of any of the points which Rav Lichtenstein raises in his article. A single thought directed me in the realization of my idea: If the religious-Zionist community, living in the

modern world, didn't have an elite of Torah scholars, it would degenerate from a religious point of view. Without the disputes of Abaye and Rava, without Gemara, there is no Judaism - nothing can remain of Judaism. Look at all the attempts that have been made in this direction over the course of our history. Look at all the study halls. You'll discover that only a place which studied and continues to study Gemara survives and endures. Go into any synagogue and see: A regular Gemara shiur lasts twenty or thirty years, while other shiurim last a year or two; no more.

Hence a person who studies Torah "takes" God with him; he develops a connection with Him. Why? I don't know. But that's the reality. I know that there are those who want a concrete answer. For their benefit I shall read a short excerpt from the Tanya (Likkutei Amarim, ch. 5):

"When any intellect perceives and understands some intellectual subject, the mind grasps that subject and encompasses it, and the subject is grasped and encompassed by, and is clothed within, the intellect that understood and perceived it... When, for example, one understands and comprehends a particular halakha in the Mishna or Gemara, clearly and thoroughly, his intellect grasps and encompasses that halakha, and his intellect is also clothed in it. Now, this halakha is the wisdom and Will of God. It so arose in His Will that if, for example, Reuven would claim thus and Shimon thus, such and such should be the verdict between them. Even if it never did nor ever will come to pass that litigation occur over these arguments and claims, yet, since it arose thus in God's Will and wisdom that if one person would claim this way and the other that way, the verdict be such and such - therefore when one knows and comprehends this verdict as a halakha set forth in the Mishna or Gemara or codifiers, he then actually comprehends and grasps the Will and wisdom of God, Whom no thought can grasp, nor [can any thought grasp] His Will and wisdom, except when [God's Will and wisdom] clothe themselves in the halakhot set before us."

A similar idea can be found in the fourth section of Nefesh HaChayim, by R. Chayim of Volozhin. Indeed, someone who wants an answer that is based on the sources need look no further. Speaking for myself, I feel that the Midrash is sufficient. I don't need to explain the connection and relationship that is created by Torah study. But for me that says a lot.  
Pt. 2 -

A person's two principle organs are his brain and his heart. The Maharal, commenting on the mishna in Avot, "May it be Your will that the Beit Ha-Mikdash be rebuilt speedily in our days, and make our portion in Your Torah," explains that there is a reference here to these two organs. Divine service is the "heart," while Torah is the "brain."

A person cannot live with only a heart. How does one serve God with his brain? By studying Torah. The brain is man's most important organ - his intellect. Could we be satisfied with serving God with our hands, with all our limbs - taking a shofar and blowing it with our mouths, holding the arba minim (four species), eating matza - while only the brain would be excluded, and would not be used in our Divine service? Someone who doesn't study Torah is missing a basic component of his Divine service. Can we relegate our intellect, our brain, to the purposes of career, attaining an academic degree or conducting business, leaving our service of God to the other limbs?

Indeed, Torah study is a precondition for Divine service. But there is something else. We need a little "ruchni'ut," a spiritual dimension. There are some people who are practical and pragmatic, real "doers," but their sole concern is for the strict letter of the law: "Tell me what my obligation is and I will fulfill it." Everything is done properly, but they lack the spiritual dimension. And it is Torah itself which lends that dimension - especially in a world like ours, which is materialistic, pragmatic, practical, here-and-now.

I was once talking to two academics, both in the field of Jewish philosophy. The first was reminiscent of that part of Jacob's ladder "whose head reached to the heavens," while the other was the "ladder standing on the ground." What was the difference between them? The difference lay in the fact that the second, in addition to his academic status, was also a talmid

chakham who set aside time for regular Gemara study. The Torah serves not only to increase a person's spirituality, but also to mould his personality in a tangible way, such that his feet are firmly planted on the ground.

Torah study has great importance specifically in our times. Every profession requires education. A farmer these days cannot be satisfied with the knowledge that farmers of the previous generation had. He needs education. When I visited an agricultural plantation some months ago, I became aware of how much needs to be learned in order to know how to grow tomatoes in this day and age. We're not speaking merely of skills. Even a plumber today needs professional training and education.

Divine service in our era will not endure unless its bearers have a Torah education. For this reason women, too, have to study. One cannot stand firm without education. This was not the case in previous generations. I had one grandfather who was a talmid chakham; he was involved in Torah study all his life. My other grandfather was a simple Jew who used to recite Tehillim. Even learning mishnayot was difficult for him. He wasn't an educated person; all his life he was involved in manual work. But can a person be a God-fearing Jew today without a Torah education? Today, even to be a simple Jew one has to be a talmid chakham!

There is another factor. We are witness to the huge progress in all spheres of science - technology, electronics, etc. All of this leaves us with an excess of free time. Thinkers all over the world are concerned with the question of what to do with all this free time. Jobs that once occupied dozens or even hundreds of workers are completed mechanically today within minutes. R. Tzaddok Hacoheh of Lublin, in his commentary on the Gemara in Sanhedrin, said that the sin of the generation of the Flood arose as a result of their culture of excess, an excess of time and leisure. They didn't know what to do with all their free time. As the Midrash describes, "They would sow once in forty years." They were technologically advanced.

What will happen in another ten years? Even the leisure industry won't be able to fill all our free time. What will we do with all our time? Is this not the source of all evil? Therefore, in our days Torah study is a necessity for human existence - to give man something worthwhile to do.

R. Chayim of Volozhin, in the fourth section of Nefesh HaChayim, recommends that from time to time a person should take a break, to reevaluate his priorities against the criterion of fear of Heaven, and to "place God before him always." I don't know whether we are at a level which allows us to grasp the meaning of placing God before ourselves continually. But often it's a good idea to take a break and think about the greatness of Torah, its noble messages, the mighty revolution which it has wrought in the world. From this perspective, it is easier to understand that the "ox which gores a cow" or the principle that "the mouth which prohibited is the mouth which permits" are part of a huge system. A scientist who deals with detail, with the single atom, with the gene which he has succeeded in isolating, inducts from his small sphere something of the wisdom which underlies the entire universe. He need not necessarily know much in other areas, but knowing as he does the wisdom concealed in the small detail in front of him, he learns to appreciate that this tiny thing is a part of the huge entity which is the world.

The same applies in the area of Torah study. The understanding of a single detail does not end with its essence and content. Each detail is part of a way of life, part of a Torah which carries morality and wisdom, kindness and honesty. The greatness of Torah lies in its composition of many small details, the "ox which gores," the "mouth which prohibits," "migo," etc.

Indeed, we need a measure of connection to Torah. The Gemara states (Sanhedrin 99b), "He who commits adultery with a woman, with no heart' (Mishlei 6:32) - this refers to someone who studies Torah occasionally." What does this mean? A man may become close to a woman in love and affection, to the point where their hearts become intertwined. But a man may also find a woman who just happens to be there, temporarily. That is the meaning of "committing adultery with a woman, with no heart." He is interested only in momentary pleasure.

Chazal are not embarrassed to compare someone who studies

Torah uncommittedly to such a person. There are some people who learn for the sake of the moment. "Wow - Torah learning is magical; it's a real intellectual pleasure!" Such a person may be compared to one who "commits adultery with a woman, with no heart." He has no inner commitment. A person can learn all day and still be counted in this category! On the other hand, a person may work hard for a living all day, but the one hour at night which he spends connecting himself with Torah makes him a true devotee of the Torah, an "ish tam yoshev ohalim."

Let me add that a person can preach to his children as much as he wants about the importance of Torah learning, but nothing is as effective as the personal example of a parent. Children are more perceptive than we give them credit for. If they see their parent come home and find time for all sorts of things - reading the newspaper, watching TV, etc. - but not for learning, then they understand how seriously he takes his preaching. On the other hand, if he doesn't preach to them, but opens a Gemara or Chumash or Mishna for an hour or two each night after a hard day's work, this speaks volumes.

The Torah demands truth. The Rebbe of Kotzk once said that for a "little piece of truth" he'd be prepared to walk to the end of the earth. "Truth" means something genuine, with no pretenses and no hypocrisy. We, as we are, should not give up. To all the doubts, second thoughts and questions, there is an enormous power for good. We must connect ourselves to Torah, with all our hearts. If we only know how to use the time we have, we shall merit to see the passion of the Beit Midrash. The Torah itself can also be compared to a "measure of chumtun" which will preserve everything else. We are assured that it will bring with it, in joy, both fear of Heaven and faith.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish. Originally delivered in Elul 5756.)

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