

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Vayakhel Pekudei – Parah - 5772

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HEAD CHECKS :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The common practice in much of Israeli and even in sections of Jewish society generally is to issue and accept post dated checks – head checks. Many pay their tuition in that fashion and redeem their charitable pledges that way as well. Some even pay their personal debts and obligations with head checks.

When I was a lawyer I had a client who though substantially wealthy, always paid his obligations with post dated checks. I informed him that technically that was not really too legal and in any event since he had the necessary currency available, why did he insist on this practice. His response was that when you give an individual or an institution a post dated check that person or institution will undoubtedly pray for your continued good health and success – at least until the check finally clears the bank.

There is really a certain amount of intuitive logic to that viewpoint. In any event issuing and/or accepting a head check is an act of faith and trust. The issuer is somehow convinced that he will see that the check will be made good on the due date and the acceptor of that check also declares his faith in the issuer that the check will be payable on the due date. Thus a more intimate relationship than usual is created between the two parties involved. The relationship is now governed by a feeling of mutual trust, wary and doubtful as the parties may really be of each other.

The God of Israel has issued us a number of long term outstanding head checks. There is a head check outstanding, though it has been partially paid in our time, regarding the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. There is another head check outstanding that promises a return of the people of Israel to a Torah way of life and to true service of God in their personal and national lives. There is a very large head check still outstanding regarding messianic times and the glory, peace, serenity and independence that that era will bring to Israel and eventually to all of humankind.

And there are numerous other head checks outstanding concerning universal peace and disarmament, a fair system of prosperity and a unified recognition of God's sovereignty over all human affairs. The Jewish people have trusted implicitly that these head checks will all be redeemed and paid in full. The rub in the matter is that all of these head checks are undated. We do not know exactly when they can be presented for payment at the heavenly bank.

Thus the quality of faith and trust that always accompanies post dated checks is compounded in the case of God's commitments to us. Undated head checks are truly a matter of trust in the issuer. Over the long history of the Jewish people Jewish trust in the issuer of those head checks to us has remained constant. Only in our time have we begun to see that some of them are perhaps currently redeemable.

A dispute has raged in the Jewish world over the past two centuries whether these checks can be presented for payment even if the issuer has apparently not specifically informed us that the due date has arrived. This was and is constantly represented in the contentiousness of the struggle over the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel.

To a certain extent we can all agree that partial payment on that head check has been made. The question is whether a head check can be redeemed in partial payments or whether the whole amount due must be paid at one shot. We really have no instruction on that matter and therefore we exist in a state of confusion and doubt regarding the trust that we placed in the redemption of that check.

And the issuer of that head check remains outwardly silent on this important matter, which only adds to our doubt and lack of clarity on the subject. The head check regarding the ingathering of the Jewish exiles to the Land of Israel has also, in the main, been cashed, even though millions of Jews voluntarily choose to remain in their lands of the Jewish Diaspora.

It seems therefore that the checks will be redeemed piece meal and not all in one complete fell swoop.

Since the head checks were undated we really have no cause for complaint or despair. We hope and pray to see all of them fully redeemed soon, but until then we must retain our trust in the issuer of these head checks and our firm belief that the entire amount will be paid to us with a full heart and open hand.

Shabat shalom

Weekly Parsha :: VAYAKHEL – PEKUDEI :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The book of Shemot concludes with a key message for Jews – accountability. The Torah records for us how the Mishkan was actually built and then it records for us a detailed accounting of how the donations for its building were actually spent and accounted for. The Torah holds Bezalel and Ahaliav accountable for their talents and industry. Their actual efforts and final accomplishments are compared to the original plans for the Mishkan as detailed to us in parshiyot Trumah and Tetzaveh.

The praise for the architects, supervisors and builders of the Mishkan is that they did not deviate from the original plans and fulfilled their tasks completely and enthusiastically – with a full heart and great commitment. They fulfilled their obligation of accountability to God and man.

There can be no greater accomplishment for a human being than fulfilling that obligation of accountability. It disciplines our minds and our behavior and creates a responsible and secure society. Much of the Jewish world today says openly or subliminally: "Don't count on me." People do not want to commit themselves to marriage, to ideals, to the Torah or the Jewish people. They do not want to engage with the test of accountability so they avoid the issue completely.

The Jewish future cannot be built on people who do not wish to be held accountable for the use of their lives, their talents and their material blessings. That is really the most important message that these parshiyot impart to us. And make no mistake about it, Judaism holds all human beings accountable in an exact fashion.

The Torah also holds Moshe accountable for the materials that were collected in order to construct the Mishkan. Every item that was donated has to be accounted for. The story is told about a bookkeeper for a certain company that was unable to balance the books of the company. He was off by five dollars. So he simply left a five dollar bill in the ledger and went home. That type of accounting is not acceptable when it comes to dealing with public funds.

Moshe feels compelled to account for every piece of silver donated to the construction of the Mishkan. And when he finds the books don't balance, he is terror stricken until he remembers that the missing amount of silver was used to manufacture the hooks that held the curtains of the Mishkan upright and taut. Only then is he relieved and his leadership role is again justified and secure.

A leader, more than the average person or simple citizen, is held to the highest possible standard of fiscal and moral accountability. The Bible records for us how the kings of Judah and Israel were continually reminded and often chastised by the prophets of their times for failing this test of responsible accountability. The Torah states the matter succinctly: "And you shall be found innocent and blameless before God and Israel."

The Torah demands accountability and is loath to accept excuses. A generation that does not feel itself accountable to the Jewish past and to the Jewish future fails miserably in its role as being the conduit of Jewish life and holiness.

Shabat shalom.

Wisdom of the Heart

"Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that G-d has commanded ..." (35:10)

There are two ways a religious person can look at an airplane flight: a series of tiring inconveniences punctuated by the occasional real bummer, or an opportunity to be an ambassador for the Jewish People and G-d.

Assuming that we all want to be in the latter category, here are some "Guidelines for the Ambassador":

1. When you arrive at the check-in, make sure that you do not push in line. Better, offer to let someone who seems to be in a rush go in front of you. (It always amazes me how people want to jump ahead to get on the plane – but the plane leaves at the same time for everyone.) 2. Smile. You're on Candid Camera!

3. Make sure you say "Have a nice day!" to people with whom you speak: the check-in person; the flight attendants; the security and the immigration personnel. 4. When you board the flight, look for a short non-religious lady/gentleman (elderly is better) struggling to put his/her bag into the overhead locker. Bound over and say, "Excuse me, can I help?" You have sanctified the name of G-d in front of a couple of hundred people.

5. Before reclining your seat, always make sure to ask the person behind if they mind.

6. Usually the "strictly kosher" food arrives before the rest of the plane is served. Better to wait till everyone else is served before starting.

7. In the arrival hall try to help a lady or elderly person remove their heavy case from the carousel.

8. Say "Thanks for looking after us!" to the police who usually supervise the luggage carousel when flights come in from Israel.

9. Never smuggle anything.

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem there was a revelation of the Divine Presence in the world that is impossible for us to imagine; it's like trying to describe a sunrise to someone who was born blind.

We live in a world of spiritual blindness where little light reaches our eyes; however, the Jewish People still have the power to reveal the Divine in our midst. The verse says, "And I will dwell in them." G-d says that His Divine Presence will dwell eternally in the Jewish People, even when the wood and stones of the Beit Hamikdash have lain in ruins for millennia.

Just as it took a wise-hearted person to build the Mishkan that revealed G-d's presence on Earth, so each of us can reveal the Divine Name with a little wisdom of the heart.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Vayakhel/Pekudei

Moshe assembled the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. (35:1)

The Avnei Nezer explains that as the Mishkan's construction came to a conclusion, Moshe Rabbeinu assembled the entire nation for the purpose of teaching them the importance of harmony. The goal of the Mishkan is to serve as the one unifying place, the singular force towards which all of the Jewish People focus their prayers and sacrifices. Until the completion of the Mishkan, it was permissible to offer sacrifices on Bamos, personal altars. Each and every Jew did his own thing, expressing his service to Hashem on his personal wavelength, exclusive of that of his neighbor. Tefillah was an individual endeavor. It was not b'tzibur, expressed through the entirety of a cohesive communal effort. It was splintered and exclusionary, while the Mishkan was to be cohesive and inclusive.

The power of a unified Klal Yisrael is awesome. In his commentary to Parashas Korach, Be'er Moshe, the Ozrover Rebbe, zl, observes what seems to be an anomaly concerning the Yehi ratzon prayer recited by the chazzan, leader of the prayer service, following Krias HaTorah on Monday and Thursday. This series of prayers which all begin with Yehi ratzon, "May it be the will," contains supplications for the health and continued welfare of the shearis Yisrael, remnant of the Jewish people in exile, for its

spiritual leadership and their families. These prayers are followed by a communal supplication which begins, Acheinu kol bais Yisrael, "Our brothers, the entire family of Yisrael," which beseeches the Almighty to deliver from distress and captivity, from pain and misery, any Jew who is in need, regardless of his geographical location. The Rebbe wonders why the last prayer does not begin with Yehi ratzon, as its predecessors do. He explains that the tefillah commences with the invocation, Acheinu kol bais Yisrael, whereby all Jews are united under one family banner. When there is unity among Jews, there is no need to ask Yehi ratzon. The eis ratzon, period of good-will, is aroused by a unified people. There is no greater inspiration for good will than when Jews act toward one another as acheinu, our brother.

Horav Moshe Soloveitchik, zl, suggests that the concept of tefillah b'tzibur, communal prayer with a minyan, quorum of at least ten men, has had a critical impact on the survival of Klal Yisrael. Ordinarily, one would wonder why tefillah b'tzibur is so important; why Chazal were very stringent in underscoring the absolute need for prayers to be recited in a communal gathering place, such as a shul. He explains that if Jews had not been compelled to pray in shul, the average Jew would not have survived the vicissitudes of life's challenges. The only ones who would have gone to the shul would have been the talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, the spiritual elite, who would all study in the shul. The simple Jew whose life does not revolve around Torah study would have no reason to attend, thus depriving himself of a spiritual relationship with like-minded Jews. A Jew alone in exile in countries where spiritual ascendency is not encouraged needs a brother, and friend, to offer him chizuk, to encourage and embolden him to maintain his spiritual affiliation. This takes place during the daily prayer services when all Jews congregate together to pray as one.

The following story underscores and defines the benefit and true essence of unity. When Napoleon Bonaparte, self-proclaimed emperor of Europe, reached the outskirts of Russia, it was the summer of 1812. He stood at the helm of an army consisting of half a million soldiers. Already having conquered most of Europe, his heart was now set on the Russian bear. He wanted so badly to conquer. He was smart enough, however, to acknowledge that this would not be a simple task. Thus, the emperor decided that, since he was to enter Russia, he would pay a visit to Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, and seek his sage advice.

"What counsel do you suggest concerning my forthcoming battle with the Russians? Will this war end in victory for me, or does a catastrophic end await my army?" Napoleon asked Rav Chaim.

Rav Chaim replied with an analogy. A prince once traveled through the countryside in a carriage that was fashioned from the finest woods. His horses were among the finest steeds in the country, each imported from a foreign land, each with its own unique pedigree. They traveled quickly through the day until nightfall, at which point the horses could not see that well. The driver, fearing for his health if the prince were to be held up, pushed the horses even harder to go faster. The road changed and became very muddy, causing the horses to slip. Once the first horse fell, the second followed, until all four horses had slipped, causing the carriage to turn over and distribute its distinguished passengers into the mud.

The horses could not pull the carriage out of the mud. A few hours went by and a simple farmer appeared, riding his wagon which was pulled by three horses that seemed to have been left over from "Pharaoh's" time. This was the region's idea of AAA road service. The prince was quite incredulous when the farmer offered to help. After all, what could the farmer's three "has been" horses do, that his own precious horses could not do? Well, it took the farmer five minutes to pull the carriage from the mud. Shocked, the prince asked, "How could your horses achieve what my horses failed to do?"

The farmer explained, "Sir, it is simple. Your horses are aristocratic, each one among the finest and most exalted steeds in its respective country. When you give a signal or touch them with your whip - each individual horse does what is best for it. It pulls the way it wants to go. It is not part of a collective team, because each horse is from a different land.

"My three horses are family, all born to the same mare. They were raised together on the same farm. While individually - horse for horse - they are

no match for any of your horses, as a team - they excel! They are all one family."

"The lesson," explained Rav Chaim, "is quite simple. As the Emperor Napoleon, you have gathered a fine army of soldiers from throughout the world! They may be individually great, but, as a team, they are lacking. The Russian army, however, is comprised of soldiers who are all from within the government's region. They are family, with each soldier feeling a sense of empathy for his brother soldier. This is an unbeatable combination. It is for this reason that I question your ability to triumph over them."

History has proven the brilliance of Rav Chaim's advice. Nothing can overcome the power of achdus, a unified group whose members work together cohesively as one.

An elderly Jew, a survivor from the European Holocaust, related the following incident which took place in the concentration camp where he was interned. The Germans employed their Jewish compatriots as guards to police themselves. In other words, if something was not perfect, the Jewish guards were taken to task. It was a "no win" situation, whereby the Jewish police were stuck between a "rock and a hard place." One day, something was taken from the commandant's office. The Gestapo came in en masse, armed to the teeth, demanding the identity of the culprit. "Who is responsible for this dastardly act?" they asked.

"We are all responsible," the prisoners answered in unison. "It is all our fault. We are all prepared to pay for our sin!"

The Gestapo were shocked by this display of unity among the prisoners. This was something to which they were not accustomed. They let them all go back to the block, with no punishment.

Every man and woman whose heart motivated them to bring for any work... brought a free-willed offering to Hashem. (35:29)

If one follows the translation of this pasuk - "Every man and woman whose heart motivated them to bring - brought a free-willed offering" - seems redundant: "Whoever was motivated to bring - brought." Is there any question concerning their offering? The commentators respond to this redundancy, each in his inimitable manner. I will focus on one such interpretation.

Horav Yehonasan Eibushitz, zl, offers a practical explanation. When Moshe Rabbeinu made his appeal for the Mishkan, the entire Jewish nation responded positively - even the erev rav, mixed-multitude. This created a problem, since the members of the erev rav were now persona non grata, after their involvement in the eigel ha'zahav, Golden Calf, debacle. Indeed, they were the initiators of the sin that cost the Jewish people dearly. They had the perverse audacity to lead the nation in serving the Golden Calf. The Mishkan was to serve as an atonement for the Golden Calf. Here they were once again at the forefront of the tumult to contribute towards the Mishkan. What unmitigated chutzpah!

The nation had no intention of accepting their contributions and allowing them access to the Mishkan. There was, however, one problem: How were they going to make up the money which the erev rav would have donated? By not including their donations, there would be a shortfall. The people came to a decision. The erev rav would not be included, yet there would be no shortfall. Why? The people would make up the difference. They would pay the erev rav's portion from their own pockets, but then would not permit the erev rav to mix in to their collective atonement. They would pay the money - all of them - just as long as the erev rav did not have a role in the Mishkan. This is what is meant by the pasuk when it implies that Bnei Yisrael gave twice. When the people saw that the kol ish v'isha, every man and woman, (referring to the erev rav), came with his or her contribution, Bnei Yisrael immediately upped the ante and gave more money to cover the shortfall. They put their money where their mouths were. It is easy to refuse the erev rav, but are we willing to pay the tab?

Pekudei

These are the reckonings of the Mishkan... which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding. (38:21)

Imagine, Moshe Rabbeinu gave an accounting of every item used for the construction of the Mishkan. He gave this accounting to the Jewish People to allay any fears that they might have concerning the propriety of his

leadership. It is astounding - almost unreal - that the adon haneviim, master of all prophets, the quintessential leader of the Jewish nation, had to prove himself. Concerning Moshe, Hashem attests: B'chol Beisi ne'eman hu, "In all My house he is trusted." Yet, Moshe felt it necessary to give a clear accounting to the people of every piece of gold, silver, copper and precious stones. Why did he do this? Was it not below his dignity?

Chazal teach us that Moshe was responding to the leitzonei ha'dor, jokers/scoffers of the generation, who grumbled that he had pocketed some of the funds. It was to this group of malcontents, individuals who liked to talk, slander, degrade and undermine, that Moshe reacted. Hashem did not ask for an accounting. The nation did not question his propriety. It was the work of a few sick individuals, the usual complainers, the ones that just have to talk, for whom whatever one does for them is still insufficient, that Moshe gave a reckoning. It seems ludicrous, but Moshe was not permitting this to fester without giving a response, which is why he presented a complete accounting of the Mishkan.

Clearly, those who spoke against Moshe were uncouth individuals, who represented the nadir of the nascent nation's citizenry. Yet, Moshe nonetheless responded. Why? Furthermore, what basis did these scoffers have? Even a joke must have some truth to it. What rationale did they have for maligning Moshe?

Be'er Yosef explains that, following Krias Yam Suf, all of Klal Yisrael became wealthy overnight. The bizas ha'yam, spoils of the Red Sea, were so vast that the Talmud ascribes enormous sums of gold, silver and precious stones to each and every Jew. Moshe, however, became wealthy neither from the spoils of Egypt, nor from the spoils of the Red Sea. He was preoccupied with locating and salvaging Yosef HaTzaddik's coffin. This mitzvah was more precious to him than "cleaning out" Egypt. Yet, Moshe was quite wealthy. What was the source of our leader's newly-found wealth? Rashi explains that when Hashem commanded Moshe to engrave the second set of Luchos, He also told him that the pesoles, carvings and chips belonged to him. These were extremely precious stones valued at a considerable sum. Moshe's bank account soared due to this pesoles.

There is, however, one catch: Hashem commanded Moshe to prepare a second set of Luchos on Tammuz 18. Moshe immediately ascended Har Sinai for a second forty-day visit. He returned on Yom Kippur. The next day, he made the appeal for the Mishkan. A few days later, the people noticed that Moshe seemed to have somehow increased his financial portfolio. How did this happen? What business deal did he arrange that netted him such profit? Overnight, their leader was transformed from living a life of abject poverty to becoming wealthy beyond the norm. Something was wrong. Moshe should be asked to explain. Apparently, the people were unaware of the pesoles of the Luchos. They had no idea that, prior to ascending Har Sinai, Moshe had fashioned the second Luchos, with a healthy profit of its pesoles going to his bank account. Thus, the people had "reason" to suspect.

Having explained the above, we still wonder why the people are considered leitzonei ha'dor, scoffers of the generations. Call them slanderers, untrusting, even foolish - but why heretics? Horav Reuven Karlinstein, Shlita, explains that, after all is said and done, the situation may be quite damaging: one does not suspect and slander a tzaddik. He should always be given the benefit of the doubt. One who does not trust a tzaddik, an individual who - at the slightest provocation, a shred of impropriety - immediately turns against the tzaddik, is a truly evil person! The lesson we derive from here is compelling. One can have abundant rationale to justify his claim against the tzaddik; the scenario appears quite bleak; in fact, there is no way to justify the tzaddik's action. Yet - if it is a tzaddik about whom one speaks, he is a slanderer, a leitz, scoffer, and his name will descend to infamy - together with all of the other wicked throughout time. The choice is simple; the ramifications are not quite so simple.

How often does the situation present itself in which circumstances imply that an individual of distinguished repute "seems" to be guilty of behavior unbecoming his station in life? This is a person who has an impeccable reputation of piety and virtue. The choice is up to us: Do we look at the

"purported" facts, or do we trust the man's distinguished track record? The choice we make will determine our spiritual status on the Heavenly scale.

Moshe saw the entire work, and behold! - they had done it... and Moshe blessed them. (39:43)

Blessing an individual who was involved in the creation and successful completion of a project is more than a token of encouragement. It ratifies his work and shows that it is appreciated. When Klal Yisrael completed the Mishkan, Moshe Rabbeinu blessed them. Rashi quotes the text of the blessing. "Yehi ratzon, may it be Hashem's Will that the Shechinah rests upon your handiwork. As you successfully completed the Mishkan, so should you merit to go on to build the Bais Hamikdash." Ralbag writes that it is appropriate for the pre-eminent leader of the generation (or any other spiritual leader, for that matter) to bless the people whenever they follow his instructions by carrying out the mission he had given them. By doing this, he will ensure an alacritous response the next time he calls upon them. Blessings make an enormous difference. Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, posits that a brachah can catalyze good fortune - if the petitioner believes that Hashem will respond favorably as a result of the blessing. He believes in the merit of the tzaddik, righteous person, to intercede with Hashem, and he believes that the Almighty will listen. Indeed, when the Jews of Dvinsk would petition the Rogatchover Gaon, zl, for a blessing, he would instruct them to "go to the Kohen," a reference to the "other" Rav of Dvinsk, Horav Meir Simchah HaKohen, the Ohr Sameach. Rav Meir Simchah was known to greet anyone who would solicit his blessing with a pleasing countenance and offered abundant blessing. He was wont to say to the petitioner, "Since you believe that my blessing will have efficacy - then be blessed, my son." Even the most efficacious blessing must be affirmed by the petitioner, or else it remains lacking. The following episode underscores this idea. A well-known segulah, omen, for success, salvation and good fortune is the purchase of Maftir Yonah on Yom Kippur. The Torah reading for Minchah on Yom Kippur is auspicious, and the Haftorah is equally so, serving as a symbol for teshuvah, repentance. One year, the Zichron Moshe Shul in Yerushalayim was the scene of a bidding war between two congregants - each wanting the z'chus, merit, of Maftir Yonah. The price kept rising quickly, until it was beyond the reach of the man who had been its fortunate annual beneficiary. He turned to the venerable Rav of the shul, Horav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, zl, and asked, "What should I do? I cannot go any higher."

Rav Fisher replied, "So you will not have it one year. Allow the other person to have it."

"No, it is a segulah for arichas yamim, longevity. That is something that I will not forego," the fellow replied.

"If that is the sole reason that you are bidding for it," Rav Fisher said, "Then I bless you with all my heart that you live a long time." Rav Fisher repeated the blessing a number of times. The other fellow bought Maftir Yonah for the first time. Everybody went home happy.

Sadly, the man who was mevater, complied with Rav Fisher's request, did not even live out the coming year. His family was grief-stricken, especially inconsolable concerning the awareness that had their father not given in, he might quite possibly still be alive. When Rav Fisher visited the family during the shivah, seven days of mourning, he was immediately questioned accusingly, "The Rav convinced our father to 'take the money and run.' Had our father hung in there, he quite possibly would still be alive. What happened to the Rav's blessing?" the family asked.

The Rav replied, "The blessing was a good and proper blessing. Indeed, I reiterated it a number of times. There was, however, one hindrance: your father did not answer Amen. A blessing which is not affirmed is restricted and stunted."

Who has the ability to offer the blessing? Does it have to be a distinguished scholar, Torah leader or tzaddik, righteous person? Normally, one would suggest that all of the above are criteria for establishing one's credentials to grant blessing. The following story indicates otherwise.

A couple in Yerushalayim had been married for seventeen years, and, while they were blessed with a wonderful, loving, harmonious marriage, something was missing in their lives: Children. After seventeen years of marriage, with many trips to great Rebbes, both to the living and to those

who had passed on, with countless visits to the greatest fertility experts, personal supplication and attempting every segulah known to man, their marriage had not produced a child. Needless to say, they were heartbroken. Indeed, the fellow had done everything, but one thing - given up hope. He still believed that one day they would have a child. He decided to petition Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, for help.

After relating everything that the couple had done in the last seventeen years, Rav Chaim replied, "After all that you have done, how can I help you? You have done it all." The young man, whom we will call Reuven, was relentless. He was not giving up that easily. "Please, Rebbe," he wailed, "help me! Take pity on me!"

Finally, Rav Chaim said, "Chazal teach in Meseches Chullin 89a, 'The world exists only on account of one who muzzles himself at a time of provocation and refrains from acting.' Chazal apply the pasuk in Iyov 26:7, 'Toleh erez al blimah, He suspends the earth on nothingness.' Chazal take the word blimah and separate the syllables, creating two words: bli - mah, referring to someone who does not respond to someone who is bolem es piv, muzzles his mouth." Rav Chaim added, "If one who restrains himself during a dispute, refusing to respond to humiliation, has the power to sustain the world, surely such an individual can effectively bless you with a child."

Easier said than done. Yet, Reuven needed no more. This was his one last thread of hope. Regrettably, locating that rare individual who was so selfless that he would never stick up for himself, that he would accept shame with dignity, was more difficult than he could imagine. Finally, one night as he entered a wedding hall, he noticed his good friend, Moshe, in a dispute with another man. The other man seemed to be winning what appeared to be a one-sided argument, since he was the one who was throwing all of the verbal punches. Moshe had not yet had the opportunity to respond, as this other fellow was heaping scorn after scorn on him.

This was the moment for which Reuven had been waiting. He immediately ran over to Moshe and pulled him aside. "Please do not respond to his diatribe," he said to Moshe. "Ignore him, and he will eventually stop."

"That is easy for you to say," Moshe told Reuven. "You are not the one who is being disgraced."

"Nonetheless, please do not reply," Reuven begged. Meanwhile, the accuser was having a field day. After all, Moshe's lack of response to his accusations proved that they were true. This added fat to the fire, as the accuser began to berate and humiliate Moshe even stronger than before.

"Please do not permit him to get to you," Reuven entreated. "Moshe, you are bigger than this. Do not allow a little humiliation to take you down to his level." Moshe listened, and, after a few more minutes, when people saw that the name-calling was nothing more than that, that there would be no fight, they left. Reuven immediately asked Moshe to bless him with a child.

Moshe was incredulous. "Are you out of your mind? Me? How can I grant you a blessing? I am far from righteous. At best, I am a simple Jew." Reuven was adamant and stood his ground. He would not leave until Moshe blessed him. He did. Reuven answered with a resounding "Amen! May it be Hashem's Will!" Reuven truthfully felt that his wait was over. He and his wife would soon be blessed with a child.

Moshe asked Reuven for an explanation, a request to which Reuven readily complied. "I never thought I could be the address for blessings," Moshe said, "but, if so, I bless you wholeheartedly that a child should soon grace your home." Less than a year later, his blessing was fulfilled.

Hu levado... oseh chadashos.

For it is He alone Who... is the Maker of new invention.

If we were to underscore two words which are the basis of this prayer, it would be Hu levado - He alone. This tefillah emphasizes the notion that man is not in charge; rather, it is all Hashem, Who is in total control. He alone is the Maker of all innovations. Indeed, as we peruse history, we note the continuing unfolding of life's events, with the various multifaceted inventions that have proliferated the world. The "ages" of the world each brought about innovative development which overshadowed the chidushim, innovations, of the previous ages. Indeed, inventions as recent as twenty-five years ago are today obsolete, as our technologically advanced society moves forward with remarkable speed. We think that we

are "sponsors" of these innovations, that it is our acumen, skill, determination and savvy that have catalyzed these developments. It is not us, but, Hu levado - He alone Who is the Cause of all causes, Master and Source of all innovations. Indeed, He is everything.

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Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshat Vayakhel-Pikudei

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

"Black Sabbath"

We were walking down the long airport corridor on the way to the boarding gate. Somehow, it seems that whenever my wife and I have a flight to catch, anywhere, our gate is always at the furthest end of the long hall. We had plenty of time until the airplane departed, but somehow I experience an urgent need to rush whenever I am in an airport, and so we were in a hurry.

There was a couple coming toward us, equally hurried. At first, they didn't even come into focus for me. They were just anonymous faces in a crowded hallway. As they came closer, there was something vaguely familiar about them. I turned to my wife and said, "Don't we know those people from somewhere?" "I don't think so," she responded, "but they resemble the Goldblatts."

As we came still closer to each other, we realized that indeed they were the Goldblatts, but a twenty years older version of the Goldblatts we knew. Of course, we were a twenty years older version too, so it was no wonder that they didn't recognize us either.

But soon we were face-to-face, and the intervening years vanished, and the good memories resurfaced. We all slowed down our rushed pace and took some time to reconnect with each other.

"We can never forget," exclaimed Mrs. Goldblatt, "the Friday night that you had us over for a Shabbat meal. What we remember most was the light – the candles, the chandelier, and the standing lamps in the corner. They made the entire dining room glow."

"Yes indeed," agreed her husband. "Real light and spiritual light; real warmth and the warmth of friendship."

I first met Mrs. Goldblatt in a professional context. She was the administrator of a large social services agency where I consulted. She was, to say the least, not a religiously observant Jew. But when her mother passed away, my wife and I paid her a condolence call. She did not "sit shiva" in any traditional sense, but let her friends and acquaintances know that she was home for the weekend and accepting condolences.

At that visit, we learned about her background. Her parents had been ardent communists, and in fact her father was the last editor of a once famous Jewish communist newspaper. She made it clear that she shared her father's atheistic vision as well as his social ideals. Her husband's weltanschauung was not very different from hers.

As we left her house, my wife and I uttered the same words to each other: "We must have them over for a Shabbat meal!" And so we did.

Now do not think for a moment that I am about to relate some wonderful story of a religious transformation. Quite the contrary. The Goldblatts came to our home one Friday night, we had a stimulating conversation, good food, and our kids behaved themselves. And then we went our separate ways, occasionally exchanging greeting cards over the years, but no more. As far as we knew, they remained religiously indifferent.

Until that encounter in the airport corridor, it was then that we learned how much of an impression that Shabbat dinner made upon them, and about how that one evening had changed their attitude toward Judaism. And of all the things that they remembered, it was the light and warmth that they remembered most.

When we were finally on our flight, I had time to think, and I found myself reflecting upon a verse in this week's double Torah portion, Vayakhel-Pekudei, (Exodus 35:1-40:38). The verse occurs very near the beginning of the parsha and reads "...On the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of

complete rest, holy to the Lord... You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day."

Two classic Jewish thinkers, neither of whom I mention frequently in this column, speak about this verse and its interpretation by an ancient sect of the Jewish people, the Karaites. This group denied that there was any interpretation possible of the Bible except a literal one. They claim that there was no such thing as an Oral Law and rebelled against rabbinic tradition.

This sect persisted for many centuries and was persecuted, along with mainstream Jews, by our enemies throughout history. I have heard tell that there are still remnants of that sect in Israel and the Balkan countries.

But all I know about the Karaites is what I have read in the works of the great Jewish philosopher, Saadia Gaon, and in the biblical commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra. Both of these sages see our verse and its interpretation as one of the major differences between traditional rabbinic Jews and the Karaite sectarians.

The rabbis understood this verse to mean that one could not kindle fire on the Sabbath, and that cooking was prohibited on that day. But they go into great detail about how to prepare in advance stoves and lamps that will heat and illuminate our homes and keep our Sabbath foods warm throughout the Sabbath day.

The Karaites understood the verse quite differently. "You shall kindle no fire..." meant, for them, that all fires had to be extinguished before sunset on Friday, and that the home had to remain dark and cold. They would partake of no warm food for the entire day.

Their Sabbath was darker still. They forbade intimate relations between husband and wife on the Sabbath, and they insisted that the biblical verse which enjoins us to remain in our places on the Sabbath was also to be taken literally. So they left their homes only to attend their houses of prayer, but not even to visit family and friends.

How different is the Sabbath prescribed by our rabbinical sages. They insist that our homes be well lit, and to this day we are careful to include at least one hot portion of food in our Sabbath day meal as a statement against the Karaite heresy.

The Goldblatts (this, of course, is not their real name) remain to this day as ignorant of rabbinic Judaism as I am of the Karaite version of our faith. But their one visit to our Shabbat table was sufficient to dispel their previous notion of the Sabbath as a day of darkness and despondency. They learned that the Sabbath home is a home of warmth and light, and that the Sabbath day is indeed a gift from the Almighty's special treasury.

My family and I are proud that we were able to create a Sabbath environment on that Friday night long ago which could teach that lesson to our dear and respected friends, the Goldblatts.

Would that each of us, less observant or more so, would create such a Sabbath environment this Friday night and for every Friday night for the rest of our lives. May we all bask in the glowing light and loving warmth of Shabbat this week as we read Parshiyot Vayakhel and Pikudei.

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Mirrors of Love

The Torah in Parshat Vayakhel, which describes the making of the Mishkan, goes out of its way to emphasize the role women played in it:

The men accompanied the women, and those who wanted to make a donation brought bracelets, earrings, finger rings, and body ornaments, all made of gold. (35: 22)

Every skilled woman put her hand to spinning, and they [all] brought the spun yarn of sky-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool and fine linen. Highly skilled women volunteers also spun the goats' wool. (35: 25-26).

Every man and woman among the Israelites who felt an urge to give something for all the work that God had ordered through Moses, brought a donation for God. (35: 29)

Indeed the emphasis is even greater than it seems in translation, because of the unusual locution in verse 22, Vayavo-u ha-anashim al hanashim, which implies that the women came to make their donations first, and the men merely followed their lead (Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rabbenu Bachye).

This is all the more striking since the Torah implies that the women refused to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf (see the commentaries to Ex. 32: 2). The women had a sense of judgment in the religious life – what is true worship, and what false – that the men lacked. Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550–1619) makes the further point that since the Tabernacle was an atonement for the Golden Calf, the women had no need to contribute at all, since it was the men not the women who needed atonement. None the less, women gave, and did so before the men.

Most moving, though, by far is the cryptic verse:

He [Bezalel] made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of the dedicated women [ha-tzove'ot] who congregated at the entrance of the Communion Tent. [Ex. 38: 8]

The sages (in Midrash Tanhuma) told a story about this. This is how Rashi tells it:

Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into when they adorned themselves. Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts]. The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, “Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt.” When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labour, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, “I am more beautiful than you.” And in this way they aroused their husbands’ desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: “Under the apple tree I aroused you” (Song 8:5). This is [the meaning of] what is *בְּמִרְיָאֵתְהֶבְיָאָה* [lit., the mirrors of those who set up legions]. From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made.

The story is this. The Egyptians sought not merely to enslave, but also to put an end to, the people of Israel. One way of doing so was to kill all male children. Another was simply to interrupt normal family life. The people, both men and women, were labouring all day. At night, says the Midrash, they were forbidden to return home. They slept where they worked. The intention was to destroy both privacy and sexual desire, so that the Israelites would have no more children.

The women realised this, and decided to frustrate Pharaoh’s plan. They used mirrors to make themselves attractive to their husbands. The result was that intimate relations resumed. The women conceived and had children (the “legions” referred to in the word *tzove’ot*). Only because of this was there a new generation of Jewish children. The women, by their faith, courage and ingenuity, secured Jewish survival.

The Midrash continues that when Moses commanded the Israelites to bring offerings to make the tabernacle, some brought gold, some silver, some bronze, some jewels. But many of the women had nothing of value to contribute except the mirrors they had brought with them from Egypt. These they brought to Moses, who recoiled in disgust. What, he thought, have these cheap objects, used by women to make themselves look attractive, to do with the sanctuary and the sacred? God rebuked Moses for daring to think this way, and ordered him to accept them.

The story is powerful in itself. It tells us, as do so many other midrashim, that without the faith of women, Jews and Judaism would never have survived. But it also tells us something absolutely fundamental to the Jewish understanding of love in the religious life.

In his impressive recent book *Love: A History* (2011) the philosopher Simon May writes: “If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew.” Judaism sees love as supremely physical and spiritual.

That is the meaning of “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might” (Deut. 6: 5). This is not the language of meditation or contemplation, philosophical or mystical. It is the language of passion.

Even the normally cerebral Maimonides writes this about the love of God:

What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love God with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one’s soul shall be knit up with the love of God, such that it is continually enraptured by it, like a lovesick individual whose mind is never free from passion for a particular woman and is enraptured by her at all times ... Even intenser should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him. They should be enraptured by this love at all times. (Laws of Repentance, 10:5)

This is the love we find in passages like Psalm 63: 2, “My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Only because the sages thought about love this way, did they take it for granted that *The Song of Songs* – an extremely sensual series of love poems – was about the love between God and Israel. Rabbi Akiva called it “the holy of holies” of religious poetry.

It was Christianity, under the influence of classical Greece, that drew a distinction between eros (love as intense physical desire) and agape (a calm, detached love of humanity-in-general and things-in-general) and declared the second, not the first, to be religious. It was this self-same Greek influence that led Christianity to read the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit as a story of sinful sexual desire – an interpretation that should have no place whatsoever in Judaism.

Simon May speaks about the love of God in Judaism as being characterised by “intense devotion; absolute trust; fear of his power and presence; and rapturous, if often questioning, absorption in his will ... Its moods are a combination of the piety of a vassal, the intimacy of friends, the fidelity of spouses, the dependence of a child, the passion of lovers ...” He later adds, “The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and ‘an eye for an eye,’ while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history.”

The Midrash dramatises this contrast between eros and agape as an argument between God and Moses. Moses believes that closeness to God is about celibacy and purity. God teaches him otherwise, that passionate love, when offered as a gift to God, is the most precious love of all. This is the love we read about in *Shir ha-Shirim*. It is the love we hear in *Yedid Nefesh*,^[1] the daring song we sing at the beginning and toward the end of *Shabbat*. When the women offered God the mirrors through which they aroused their husbands’ love in the dark days of Egypt, God told Moses, “These are more precious to Me than anything else.” The women understood, better than the men, what it means to love God “with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshios Vayakhel & Pekudei Story With Rav Chaim of Volozhin and the Meshullach's Expense Account

This week, we will be shedding insight into two pasukim in Parshas Vayakhel -- one with the story of a Torah personality who resonates with our readers who are Misnagdim and one story with a Torah personality who resonates with those who are Chasidim.

In Parshas Vayakhel, the Torah says that "Hashem has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Yehudah. He filled him with the 'spirit of Elokim', with wisdom, with understanding and with knowledge, and with every craft -- to make artistic designs (v'lachoshev machashavos) to work with the gold, with the silver and with the copper..." [Shmos 35:30-32]

We will explain this last expression (v'lachoshev machashavos) via a famous story told about Rav Chaim of Volozhin, the preeminent disciple of the Gaon of Vilna and the founder and first head of the Yeshiva in Volozhin, Lithuania. The "Volozhiner Yeshiva" started in the early 1800s and was the first "modern day Yeshiva," after which many other such schools were mo deled.

In addition to being the "Grand Daddy" of all Yeshivos in terms of educational curriculum, the "Volozhiner Yeshiva" also founded many other practices associated with subsequent Yeshivos including the institution of "meshulachim" (hired fund-raisers sent by an institution to distant communities to collect funds for the Yeshiva).

The "Volozhiner Yeshiva" had several such charity collectors who went around from city to city and from village to village in various locations in Eastern Europe. One of them came to the head of the Yeshiva, Rav Chaim, and told him that there were flaws in the system. In those days, the way a meshulach travelled around was with a hired wagon driver, who provided the rough equivalent of a car service. The meshulach complained that he was wasting his time and the Yeshiva's time with the inefficiency of the setup. First, it was not easy to find wagon drivers and then the wagon drivers had multiple stops with many passengers. The system lacked efficiency. He argued that if he were given his own horse and cart, he could save significant time and be much more effective for the Yeshiva. He further said that when he came into donors homes shabbily dressed, he did not make a good impression. He suggested that if the Yeshiva could afford to provide him with a proper suit and coat, as a type of uniform to indicate he was representing a high class institution, the results would be more impressive.

Rav Chaim Volozhin was sympathetic to the meshulach's arguments. He understood that "to make money you need to spend money" and he authorized the purchase of a horse and cart as well as a dignified set of clothing for the Yeshiva's designated fundraiser.

Rav Chaim had the practice of reviewing receipts from each city where he would send fund-raisers to collect. There was one Jew in a certain city who always used to give generously to the Yeshiva. He was not a wealthy man, but rather a simple villager who nonetheless gave a sizable donation each year, way beyond his means. Rav Chaim noticed that the next time this particular meshulach went to this man's village, the man did not give anything at all to the Yeshiva. Rav Chaim inquired as to what happened. The meshulach told him "I don't know. I came into him like always and I expected a warm reception and a sizable donation as usual, but this time he gave a cold shoulder and no donation. I don't know why!"

Rav Chaim was perplexed. He told his meshulach, "Let us both go together to see this fellow and ask him again for a donation." They both went and knocked on his door. The fellow was blown away that the greatest Rabbi of the generation, the famous disciple of the Gaon of Vilna, was standing before him! He invited them in and after the initial niceties and refreshments, Rav Chaim got to the purpose of his visit. "What happened? All these years you gave us such a nice donation, and this year you cut us off completely?"

The simple Jew responded as follows. Every year when I sacrificed and gave my contribution I thought to myself: "I am giving to the Volozhiner Yeshiva -- the pre-eminent Torah institution in the entire region -- so young men can sit and learn Torah and develop into great Jewish leaders." But when I saw your well dressed meshulach come with his own cart and his own horse I asked myself "Is this what I'm giving my money for -- for a horse and cart and finery? I wanted my money to go for the study of Torah not for transportation costs and a uniform!"

Rav Chaim Volozhin told him, I want to explain the matter to you by interpreting a pasuk in Chumash. After the Torah already told us "And G-d filled Bezalel with the 'Spirit of Elokim'", what does the Torah mean to tell us when it adds the fact that he is one knows "lachashov machashavos" [literally to think thoughts] to do with the gold, the silver and the copper?

Rav Chaim explained that Bezalel was given a special form of Ruach HaKodesh [Divine Spirit]. There was gold used for the items in the Mishkan that were at the pinnacle of holiness -- the Aron, the Menorah, the Shulchan, and the Mizbeyach (of incense). There was also money used in the Mishkan for things that were not as holy, for example, the boards and the curtains. Bezalel had the Divine Spirit to know that when a person gave money strictly for the sake of heaven in a highly spiritual intent, that was money used for the holiest of the keylim. When a person gave money with ulterior motives, then Bezalel knew to earmark that money for the boards, the curtains, or the less "holy" utensils in the Mishkan.

This is the interpretation of the pasuk: Bezalel looked into the precious metals that were given and he knew why they were given and therefore what to do with them. The same is true with donations to our Yeshiva. There are people who give money strictly so that the young men can learn Torah; they are not interested in any of the amenities or the bells and whistles. However, some people cannot focus in on the main purpose of a Yeshiva. If they see a physical dump or they see a representative of the Yeshiva who is poorly dressed without adequate means of transportation, they will be turned off by that. It is for the latter category of contributors that I had to dress up my fund-raiser and give him his own horse and wagon. Rest assured, I know the holy intent with which your contribution is given. Your money goes only to support the Torah learning of our students. It is the money of the other people who focus on material matters that is used to purchase the horse and carriage and wardrobe of my meshulach.

Story of Reb Zusha, His Rebbetzin, the Seamstress, and the Wedding Gown

In narrating the story of the building of the Mishkan, the Torah says: "They took from before Moshe the entire portion that the Children of Israel had brought for the work for the labor of the sanctuary, to do it; but they (also) brought to him additional voluntary donations each morning." [Shmos 36:3]

Rav Shlomo Kluger asks why the Torah singles out the fact that they collected money from those involved in the work in addition to the donations from "the Children of Israel". Let the Torah state they took money from everybody (which is in fact what happened) and we will know that those who did the work are also included?

He explains the matter with a story:

The daughter of the Rebbe Reb Zusha was engaged. The Rebbe's wife, mother of the Kallah, went to the seamstress to order a beautiful gown for her daughter. Four or five weeks later, the Rebbetzin went back to the seamstress to pick up the gown for the bride. However, she returned home without the gown. The Rebbe asked her what happened. She related that she in fact picked up the gown but that as she was leaving the store, she noticed that the seamstress was crying.

The Rebbetzin inquired why she was crying and the seamstress told her "It is because I also have a daughter who is a Kallah. I wish I could afford such a gown for my own daughter. The Rebbetzin explained to her husband, "I told her on the spot -- 'You keep the gown!'" Reb Zusha was overjoyed that his wife fulfilled the mitzvah of Hachnasas Kallah [providing for the needs of a bride] in such a noble fashion.

But then he asked his Rebbetzin, "Did you pay her for the gown?" Reb Zusha's wife was incredulous at the question. "What do you mean did I pay her for the gown? I gave her the gown! Must I pay her for the gown on top of that as well?"

"Indeed you must!" Reb Zusha told his wife. "After all, she did work for you for five weeks, so you must pay her for the gown." The Rebbetzin told her husband that he was right and she returned and paid the seamstress for the gown that she had just "given" her.

Rav Shlomo Kluger related this incident to explain our pasuk in Vayakhel. There were some people who just donated money. But there were people who worked for the Mishkan as well. Did they give money? They could have easily argued, "We worked in lieu of our money. Our contribution to the Mishkan was our effort and labor!" (i.e. -- We gave at the office!) That is why the pasuk emphasizes that not only were donations received from the masses of the Children of Israel; they were also received from those who did the labor.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Parsha Parables - Parshas Vayakhel-Pekidei 5772
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Stories & Anecdotes that Illuminate the Weekly Torah Portion and Holidays

Dedicated in loving memory of Rohoda Fuchs Rivka Matil bas Rav Yaakov A"H by Mr. & Mrs. Avram Weissman

A Little Bit More

Mazel Tov! After a magnanimous show of unity, men and women of all the shevatim opened their hearts, minds, talents and purses to complete the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, in the desert. In the next two Torah parshiyos (Torah portions), the Torah summarizes the accomplishment by detailing the work that was done by Betzalel and the devoted artisans and craftsmen. Moshe declares the success of the campaign and the generosity of the donors by announcing, that "the work (and contributions) had been enough for all the work, to do it— and there was extra" (Exodus 36:7). Not only was there enough for the completion of the task - there was extra.

But many commentaries are concerned about Moshe's seemingly strange expression of completion. "There was enough, and there was extra." After all, if there was enough, then there was not extra. And if there was extra then it should not be called enough!

Further, what is the difference if there was extra or not?

The Story

In the whY I Matter Parsha sheet by the Young Israel of Midwood Edited by Yedidye Hirtenfeld, I saw the following story about one of the great sefardic chachamim of our generation, R' Ben Zion Abba Shail, z"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Yerushalayim.

When R' Ben Zion was about 20 years old, and learning at Yeshivat Porat Yosef, one of the leading American sages, R' Eliezer Silver, came to the Yeshiva in the company of a wealthy American who was investigating which yeshiva was most worthy of his sizable donation. R' Ben Zion was chosen as the student to be tested by R' Silver who asked the young scholar a question in the obscure area of Taharot (laws of ritual purity). When R' Ben Zion gave his answer, R' Silver said that he had asked the same question 40 years earlier to R' Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk (author of Ohr Sameach and Meshech Chochmah) and had received the same answer. R' Ben Zion later told R' Attiah that he had a second answer to the question as well, but since the first answer sufficed to secure the donation, offering a second answer might have been considered showing-off.

The Message

I was curious as to why R' Benzion actually related that he had an extra answer, even though he did not offer it. Isn't that showing off as well?

Maybe the answer lies within these verses.

Magnanimous giving is not only in the fulfillment of the request, but in the way it is fulfilled. The noble manner in which something is prepared - in a way that there is always more, or with a desire to give even more, is an indicator of the significance of the actual gift that was eventually given.

When one has the ability, the desire and preparedness to give not only what he is asked, but to even give more, then we know that the original gift is not a begrudged offering, it is as special as if more was actually given.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
VaYakheil: Two Layers of Wisdom

Two spun coverings stretched out across the roof of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle of God's service in the desert. The inner covering was a resplendent work of fine linen and colorful wool, dyed indigo, purple, crimson. The outer covering was a simpler affair, made solely of goat-wool. One might think that the magnificent inner covering was the greater of the two. Yet the Talmud notes that the outer wool covering required

greater wisdom to make. The Torah describes the women involved in spinning the multi-colored covering as being 'wise-hearted.' Regarding the simpler, outer covering, on the other hand, the Torah indicates that the women utilized a special, sublime wisdom. They were "women whose hearts uplifted them in wisdom" (Ex. 35:25).

And what was this special wisdom? According to the Talmud in Shabbat 99a, the wool was washed and spun - while still attached to the goats!

Abstract and Practical Wisdom

The Sages compared the building of the Mishkan to the creation of heaven and earth. The details of the Tabernacle construction correspond to the configuration of the universe, both physically and spiritually.

Rav Kook explained that these two Tabernacle coverings relate to two separate layers of wisdom, the basis for spiritual light and holiness in the world. The first layer of wisdom is abstract and general in nature, while the second is practical and detailed. The abstract wisdom shines brilliantly with the multiple facets of the intellect and the varied hues of the imagination. This general wisdom deals with inner, sublime matters, and thus corresponds with the colorful, inner covering.

Practical wisdom, on the other hand, would appear to be a simpler matter, serving primarily to protect and guard the abstract concepts of the inner, hidden wisdom. But in truth, the practical wisdom of how to apply abstract principles in everyday life is both profound and uncommon. Spiritual abstractions may be revealed through normal prophecy and divine inspiration; but the eternal Torah of deeds and mitzvot was revealed to the world only by means of Moses' unique level of prophetic vision.

"The women whose hearts uplifted them in wisdom." These women were blessed with the gift of innermost wisdom. By virtue of its profound depth, they were able to elevate the heart - all feelings and emotions, all actions and deeds, all of life. Their wisdom was so great that "they spun [on] the goats." Even life's material and vexing aspects - as symbolized by the goat - were bound and tied to the supernal light of eternity.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 245-246)

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Weekly Halacha
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Respect and Honor: How to Treat a Kohen

Included in Hashem's commandment to Moshe to appoint his brother Aharon and his sons as kohanim is the Biblical command: You shall sanctify him... he shall remain holy to you.¹ The Torah commands us to acknowledge the sanctity of kohanim by showing them respect and giving them preferential treatment, since they are the ones who are entrusted to perform the sacred Service in the Mishkan and Beis ha-Mikdash. This mitzvah is divided into two parts: a) the mitzvah of honoring a kohen; b) the prohibition against using the services of a kohen for one's needs. Let us elaborate:

The Mitzvah of Honoring a Kohen

Question: How do we honor a kohen?

Discussion: Whenever a blessing is recited in public, a kohen should be the one asked to recite it. Thus a kohen is the first one to be called up to the Torah whenever it is read. At meal time, he is the one who is asked to recite Kiddush, Birkas ha-Motzi and Birkas ha-Mazon. In addition, a kohen is served first, he is asked to speak first and is generally given more respect than a yisrael or a levi.²

Some poskim mention that a levi is given priority over a yisrael in all of the above honors, just as he is called to the Torah before a yisrael.³ Other poskim hold that a levi does not take precedence at all.⁴

Question: May a kohen forego his honor?

Discussion: A kohen may be mochel (lit.: release others from paying him) the honor due him (except being called up first to the Torah).⁵ The reason why a kohen may be mochel his honor is based on the Rabbinic dictum⁶ that "one honors a man by doing his will." Since the kohen wants to bestow upon someone else the honor due him, that, in turn, becomes his honor.⁷

If a yisrael recites Birkas ha-Mazon in the presence of a kohen, he must ask for the kohen's permission. It is not sufficient to merely say 'bi-reshus ha-kohen', if there is a possibility that the kohen would object.⁸

As stated above, the only exception to the rule that a kohen may forego his honor is that he must be called up first to the Torah. This is a rabbinic edict instituted by the Sages, who insisted that the kohen always accept his aliyah lest he defer to some people and not to others, and thus cause discord among members of the shul.⁹

Question: Are there any exceptions to the requirement of honoring a kohen?

Discussion: The following situations are considered exceptions to the mitzvah of honoring a kohen:

* The head of a household is not obligated to offer a kohen guest the honor of reciting ha-motzi¹⁰ or Birkas ha-Mazon.¹¹

* If the kohen is a learned person but the yisrael is a greater talmid chacham than he, the yisrael is not obligated to honor the kohen. It is, nevertheless, proper for him to do so, and one who does so is rewarded with longevity.¹²

* If the kohen is a bona fide am ha-aretz, a yisrael—who is a talmid chacham—is not permitted to honor the kehunah of such a kohen, since he is thereby degrading the honor of the Torah.¹³

The Prohibition of Using the Services of a Kohen

The second half of the obligation to honor a kohen is the prohibition against having him perform "services" for the benefit of a Yisrael.¹⁴ It is forbidden to ask a kohen to serve a yisrael or to send him on an errand, etc. Even if a kohen waives his status and allows a yisrael to use his services, this should not be done l'chatchilah, and certainly, the yisrael should never ask a kohen to perform a lowly task for him like emptying the garbage,¹⁵ etc. For this reason, it is preferable that a kohen not enter a profession which may require his yisrael employer to order him to engage in degrading types of work.¹⁶

Question: When is it permitted for a yisrael to benefit from the services of a kohen?

* If a kohen receives payment or if he is serving a distinguished person and derives pleasure from serving him, it is permitted to ask the kohen to serve a yisrael.¹⁷ Similarly, if a kohen offers to serve a yisrael without being told to do so, it is permitted to accept his offer.¹⁸

* Some poskim allow a yisrael to use the services of a kohen am ha'aretz, although not in a demeaning manner.¹⁹ A kohen who violates the sanctity of the kehunah by marrying a divorcee or entering a cemetery when he is forbidden to do so, etc., forfeits the privileges of the kehunah. It is not a mitzvah to honor him, nor are there any restrictions on asking him to perform services. Such a kohen is excluded from nesias kapayim as well.²⁰

* The poskim debate whether these halachos pertain to a kohen who is a minor²¹ or who has a blemish which renders him unfit for Service in the Beis ha-Mikdash.²²

Question: Why are some people not careful to observe these halachos?

Discussion: The poskim offer two possible reasons for their behavior:

* Now that the Beis ha-Mikdash is destroyed, this mitzvah does not apply—except for those who conduct themselves lifnim mi-shuras hadin.²³

* With the passage of time, the lineage and yichus of the kohanim have become blurred. Thus we are not positive who is a kohen.²⁴

* These objections notwithstanding, the majority of the poskim agree that the mitzvah of honoring a kohen applies even nowadays²⁵ and we should not doubt the purity of lineage of our kohanim.²⁶

1 Vayikra 21:8. There is a dispute among the Rishonim if this is a mitzvas assei min ha-Torah or mi-deRabbanan; See Magen Avraham 201:4 and Korban Nesanel 300 (Rosh, Gittin 5:20).

2 Mishnah Berurah 201:13.

3 Mishnah Berurah 201:12; Kaf ha-Chayim 167:101.

4 Aruch ha-Shulchan 201:4. This is the prevailing custom; Ben Ish Chai (Korach 14).

5 Rama 128:45; Mishnah Berurah 201:13.

6 Originally appearing in Sefer Chasidim 152.

7 Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 128:60; Eishel Avraham 128:45.

8 Mishnah Berurah 167:75. See Piskei Teshuvos 201:3.

9 Mishnah Berurah 135:9. The custom is that even a private minyan always calls up the kohen first. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 12. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:34 and 3:20 for possible exceptions.

10 Mishnah Berurah 167:73.

11 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 167:65 and Beur Halachah 201:1, s.v. v'im; Aruch ha-Shulchan 201:4.

12 O.C. 167:14 and Mishnah Berurah 71; 201:12.

13 O.C. 201:2; Mishnah Berurah 167:70.

14 According to some poskim, a kohen cannot serve another kohen either. Others allow this; see Kesav Sofer, O.C. 15; Beur Halachah 128:45, s.v. assur; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:75; Kaf ha-Chayim 128:283.

15 Mishnah Berurah 128:175; Yabia Omer 6:22. See also the Chafetz Chayim's opening remarks to Shemiras ha-Lashon where he rules that one who speaks lashon ha-ra about a kohen (in the presence of the kohen) transgresses the halachah of honoring a kohen.

16 Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Nishmas Avraham, O.C. 128:10.

17 Mishnah Berurah 128:175.

18 Eishel Avraham 128:45; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72; Kaf ha-Chayim 128:282.

19 Beur Halachah 128:45, s.v. assur. Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72 disagrees.

20 O.C. 128:40-41.

21 Mishnah Berurah 282:12 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 15 quotes a dispute between Magen Avraham and Rav Akiva Eiger concerning this. See Emes l'Yaakov al ha-Torah, Vayikra 21:8.

22 Most poskim maintain that a kohen who has a blemish is included in this mitzvah. See, however, Minchas Chinuch 269, Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72 and Teshuvos Avnei Cheifetz 71.

23 R. Tam (quoted by Taz 128:39); Mekor Chayim 128:45.

24 Magen Avraham 201:4. Many other poskim are also of the opinion that the kohanim's yichus is questionable; see Y.D. 322 Taz 5 and Shach 9; Sh'ealas Ya'avetz 155; Chazon Ish, Shevi'is 5:12. See also Rama, O.C. 457:2 and Mishnah Berurah 22.

25 Mishnah Berurah 128:174; Aruch ha-Shulchan 71. See Rivash 94.

26 Maharit 1:149; Be'er Heitev, O.C. 128:83; Aruch ha-Shulchan, O.C. 128:72; Y.D. 305:55.

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Indigestible Matzos or Performing Mitzvos when Suffering from Food Allergies

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: I have acid reflux, and as a result I never drink any alcohol, since it gives me severe heartburn. I also have difficulty tolerating grape juice, which does not agree with me. Am I required to drink either wine or grape juice for the four cups at the Seder?

Question #2: My body is intolerant to gluten. Am I required to eat matzoh on Pesach, and if so, how much?"

Question #3: How far must one go to fulfill the mitzvah of maror, when the only variety available is straight horseradish?

Consuming matzoh, maror, wine or grape juice is uncomfortable for many people, for a variety of reasons. Consumption of these foods exacerbates many medical conditions, such as allergies, diabetes, celiac disease, Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome, and reflux. To what extent must someone afflicted by these conditions extend him/herself to fulfill these

mitzvos? Does it make a difference whether the mitzvah is required min haTorah, such as matzoh, or miderabbanan, such as arba kosos, the mitzvah of drinking the four cups of wine at the Seder. (Similarly, the mitzvah of maror is required today only miderabbanan, since the Torah requires eating maror only when we offer the korban pesach.)

PIKUACH NEFESH

One is never required to perform a positive mitzvah when there is a potential threat to one's life. Quite the contrary, it is forbidden to carry out any mitzvah whose performance may be life-threatening. Therefore, someone who has a potentially life-threatening allergy to grain may not consume matzoh or any other grain product – ever – and this prohibition applies fully on Seder night.

NOT DANGEROUS BUT UNPLEASANT

However, must one observe these mitzvos when the situation is not life threatening, but is painful or affects one's wellbeing? Must one always fulfill the mitzvah, even though doing so is extremely uncomfortable or makes one unwell? As always, our column is not intended to provide psak halacha; that should be left for one's personal rav. Our goal is to provide halachic background.

RABBI YEHUDAH'S HEADACHE

The Gemara reports that the great Tanna Rabbi Yehudah, who is quoted hundreds of times in the Mishnah and Gemara, suffered from the consumption of wine. The Gemara tells us the following anecdote:

Rabbi Yehudah looked so happy that a Roman woman accused him of being inebriated. He responded that he is a teetotaler, "Trust me that I taste wine only for kiddush, havdalah and the four cups of Pesach. Furthermore, after drinking four cups of wine at the Seder, I have a splitting headache that lasts until Shavuos" (see Nedarim 49b).

This passage implies that one is required to undergo a great deal of discomfort to fulfill any mitzvah – even one that is rabbinic in origin – and certainly a Torah-required law, such as consuming matzoh on Pesach. Based on this story, the Rashba (Shu"t 1:238) requires someone who avoids wine because he despises its taste or because it harms him ("mazik") to drink the four cups at the Seder; this conclusion is quoted definitively in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 472:10). Thus, one might conclude that it is necessary to fulfill the mitzvah of arba kosos in any non-life-threatening situation, even when the consequences are unpleasant.

However, several authorities sanction abstaining from arba kosos under certain extenuating, but not life-threatening, circumstances, even though they also accept the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch! For example, the Aruch HaShulchan (472:14) permits someone who is ill to refrain from consuming the four cups on Seder night, and the Mishnah Berurah rules similarly (472:35). They explain that the harm (in Hebrew, mazik) one must undergo to fulfill the mitzvah does not include physical harm, but is limited to discomfort or moderate pain.

DERECH CHEIRUS

In Shaar HaTziyun, the Mishnah Berurah explains why he permits refraining from arba kosos under such circumstances: Becoming bedridden because one consumed arba kosos is not derech cheirus, which I will translate as demonstrating freedom. His reference to derech cheirus alludes to the following Gemara:

One who drinks the wine undiluted has fulfilled the requirement of arba kosos, but he did not fulfill the requirement of demonstrating freedom (Pesachim 108b).

What does this Gemara mean? Why does drinking one's wine straight not fulfill this mitzvah called demonstrating freedom?

The wine of the Gemara's era required one to dilute it before drinking. Imbibing it straight was not the normal method of drinking, and therefore did not demonstrate the freedom that the Seder emphasizes.

The Mishnah Berurah contends that a mitzvah whose purpose is to demonstrate that we are free men cannot require becoming bedridden as a result. Although a potential massive headache, such as what affected Rabbi Yehudah, does not exempt one from the mitzvah, becoming bedridden is

qualitatively worse. The Aruch HaShulchan rules similarly, although he omits the reasoning of derech cheirus, and simply assumes that the mitzvah could not apply under these circumstances.

(There may be a difference in opinion between the Mishnah Berurah and the Aruch HaShulchan germane to mitzvas maror. The Mishnah Berurah's reason of derech cheirus applies only to the arba kosos, and therefore, he might hold that one must eat maror, even if he becomes bedridden as a result. However, the Aruch HaShulchan's ruling may apply to any rabbinic mitzvah, and thus permit someone who would become ill from eating maror to abstain from performing this mitzvah.)

ALCOHOLIC CONTENT

Let us assume that our patient could drink grape juice without any ill result, but may have some difficulty with wine. Is there a requirement for him/her to drink wine?

The Gemara states that "One may squeeze a cluster of grapes and then immediately recite Kiddush over it" (Bava Basra 97b). Obviously, this grape juice has no alcoholic content, and yet it is acceptable for Kiddush.

However, the Gemara's ruling that someone who drank the arba kosos without dilution does not fulfill cheirus implies that the Seder mitzvah requires a wine with alcoholic content, and therefore grape juice does not perform this aspect of the mitzvah. Nevertheless, someone who cannot have any alcohol may fulfill the mitzvah of arba kosos with grape juice (Shu"t Shevet HaLevi 9:58).

DILUTING WINE

Is it better for someone to dilute their wine with water rather than drink grape juice?

Some authorities contend that one fulfills the concept of cheirus as long as one can detect alcoholic content, even though the wine is diluted. However, before diluting our wine with water, we will need to contact the manufacturer or the hechsher, since some wines are already diluted to the maximum halachically allowable to permit reciting hagafen over them. The Pri Megadim (Eishel Avraham 204:16) rules that although Chazal diluted their wine significantly (Shabbos 77a), our wine is very weak and should be diluted very moderately. He contends that if one adds more water than wine, the bracha becomes shehakol; one can certainly not use this wine for Kiddush or arba kosos. The Aruch HaShulchan (204:14) rules even more strictly, that any added water renders our wines shehakol and invalidates them for Kiddush or arba kosos. I suspect that this was not a dispute, but a reflection of the quality of the wine available; the wine available to the Pri Megadim could be diluted without ruining it, as long as there was more wine than water, whereas that available to the Aruch HaShulchan was easily ruined.

On the other hand, diluting wine with grape juice does not jeopardize the bracha and still fulfills the concept of cheirus, as long as the alcohol content is still noticeable.

ARBA KOSOS SUBSTITUTES

If someone cannot drink four cups of wine or grape juice, should they simply not drink anything for the arba kosos?

The Mishnah Berurah rules that one may substitute chamar medinah, literally, the national "wine." This follows a ruling of the Rama (483) that someone who has no available wine may fulfill the mitzvah of arba kosos with chamar medinah.

Exactly what chamar medinah includes is beyond the scope of this article. For our purposes, I will note that there is much debate concerning this matter, some rabbonim holding that tea or coffee qualifies as chamar medinah; others contending that only alcoholic beverages qualify as chamar medinah, and still others maintaining that most places today have no chamar medinah.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Thus far, we have concluded that someone who will become ill enough to be bedridden may not be obligated in arba kosos, but someone who finds drinking four cups of wine or grape juice uncomfortable and even painful,

but does not become bedridden as a result, is required to drink them. However, note that sometimes one may be more lenient and use a smaller cup and drink a smaller proportion of its wine than we would usually permit. These are matters to discuss with one's rav.

WHAT ABOUT MATZOH?

Our second question above read: "My body is intolerant to gluten. Am I required to eat matzoh on Pesach, and if so, how much?"

Our previous discussion explained only the rules pursuant to drinking the four cups of wine, which is a rabbinic mitzvah. Does any leniency exist to exempt someone from eating matzoh Seder night, which is a requirement *min haTorah*? Granted, one is certainly not required or permitted to eat matzoh if doing so may be life-threatening, but if the results are simply discomfort, to what degree must one extend oneself to observe a positive mitzvah when doing so is not life threatening?

The Binyan Shelomoh (#47), a nineteenth century work authored by Rav Shelomoh of Vilna, the city's halachic authority at the time, discusses this very issue. (Out of deference to the Vilna Gaon, the Jewish community of Vilna appointed no one to the title of rav from the passing of the Gaon, until the government required them to do so, over a hundred and twenty years later in the era of Rav Chayim Ozer Grodzenski.) In a lengthy responsum, The Binyan Shelomoh establishes how far someone ill must go to eat matzoh when doing so is not life threatening. He bases his analysis on the following law:

Chazal prohibited spending more than one fifth of one's money to fulfill a positive mitzvah (Rambam, Hilchos Arachin 8:13, based on Gemara Kesubos 50a. See also Rambam's Peirush HaMishnayos Pei'ah 1:1).

The Binyan Shelomoh reasons that since maintaining good health is more important to most people than spending a fifth of one's money, one is exempt from performing a mitzvah that will impair one's health, even when there is no risk to one's life. (We find other authorities who derive similar laws from this halacha. See for example, Shu"t Avnei Nezer, Yoreh Deah #321; Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even HaEzer 1:57). The Binyan Shelomoh applies this rule to all mitzvos: One is exempt from observing any mitzvah if fulfilling it will seriously impair his/her health. Furthermore, one could conclude that if fulfilling a mitzvah causes such intense discomfort that one would part with one fifth of one's financial resources to avoid this pain, one may forgo the mitzvah.

According to the Binyan Shelomoh, if this law is true regarding matzoh, it will certainly hold true regarding arba kosos and maror, which are only rabbinic requirements. Thus, someone who will not be bedridden as a result of consuming arba kosos or maror, but whose health will be severely impaired as a result of this consumption is absolved from fulfilling this mitzvah, as will someone to whom the consumption is so unpleasant that he would gladly part with one fifth of his earthly possessions to avoid this situation.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MATZOH AND WINE

If we assume that the Mishnah Berurah accepts the Binyan Shelomoh's approach and vice versa, we would reach the following conclusion:

MATZOH:

Someone whose health will be severely impaired is not required to eat matzoh on Pesach, even if no life-threatening emergency results.

ARBA KOSOS:

In addition to the above leniency regarding matzoh, there is an additional leniency regarding the arba kosos. Someone who will become sick enough that he will become bedridden is absolved from drinking four cups at the Seder, even though it will not result in any permanent health problems. However, it is unclear whether this latter leniency also extends to the rabbinic mitzvah of maror.

NON-WHEAT FLOURS

In the last few years, matzoh for Pesach produced from either spelt or oat flour has become available. For a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this article, only someone who may not eat regular matzoh should eat these

matzoh on Pesach. However, someone who is absolved from eating matzoh on Pesach according to the above-mentioned definition, but who can eat either of these varieties of matzoh, should eat them to fulfill the mitzvah on the first night of Pesach. Someone who can tolerate both spelt and oat matzoh should eat spelt.

No discussion of this topic is complete without mention of the following responsum by the great nineteenth century authority, the Maharam Shik (Shu"t #260). Someone for whom eating matzoh or maror is potentially life threatening insisted on eating them at the Seder against the halacha. The Maharam Shik was asked whether this person should recite the bracha al achilas matzoh before eating the matzoh and al achilas maror before eating the maror!

The Maharam Shik responded that he is uncertain whether the patient may recite any bracha at all before eating the matzoh and the maror, even the bracha of hamotzi! His reason is that consuming harmful food is not considered eating, but damaging oneself, and one does not recite a bracha prior to inflicting self-harm! The Maharam then questions his supposition, demonstrating that someone who overeats recites a bracha even though he is clearly damaging himself. He therefore concludes that one does not recite a bracha when eating something that causes immediate damage. However, when eating something where the damage is not immediate, reciting a bracha before eating is required.

Pursuant to the original shaylah as to whether one recites al achilas matzoh before eating the matzoh, and al achilas maror before eating the maror, the Maharam Shik concludes that one should not recite these brachos in this situation. Since the patient is not permitted to eat matzoh and maror because it is dangerous to his life, he is not performing a mitzvah when eating them, but a sin of ignoring the proper care his body requires, and one does not recite a bracha prior to transgressing.

In conclusion, anyone to whom these shaylos are relevant should discuss them with his/her rav. We found that the Shulchan Aruch rules that one is required to fulfill arba kosos, even if one will suffer a severe headache as a result, and certainly if one despises the taste. However, should one become bedridden as a result or suffer severe health consequences, there are authorities who permit forgoing drinking wine or grape juice and substituting a different beverage that qualifies as *chamar medinah*. Similarly, there are authorities who permit forgoing consuming matzoh at the Seder if one would suffer severe health consequences as a result, even if the situation is not life-threatening.

Although not everyone may be able to fulfill the mitzvos of eating matzoh, maror, and arba kosos, hopefully all will be able to discuss the miracles that Hashem performed when taking us out of Egypt. In the merit of joyously performing the mitzvos of Seder night, may we soon see the return of the Divine Presence to Yerushalayim and the rededication of the Beis HaMikdash, and be *zocheh* to fulfill all of these mitzvos, including the *korban pesach*!

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org Vayakhel-P'kudei - "Returning Lost Objects" Rabbi Asher Meir

The Torah commands us to return lost objects to their original owners (Devarim 22:1-3). The gemara teaches us that there are basically two levels to this mitzva. If the original owner retains a reasonable expectation of finding the object, then it remains his and the finder must return the object. If there is no real hope, then technically the finder may keep the object, but if we know who the owner is or can easily find out, it is still praiseworthy to return the item (SA CM 262:5, 259:5). The first level of obligation doesn't apply to non-Jews at all; the second often does.

In a previous column, we explained that these two levels of obligation correspond to two levels or approaches to ownership. At one level is the utilitarian or formal rules of ownership, which society adopts in order to create orderly economic relations. Above this is a more profound and spiritual concept of ownership, where ownership of an object involves a responsibility to use our property in furthering G'd's will and acting as an agent of His providence. This level reaches its highest level among the Jewish people.

The Torah is primarily concerned with eternal, spiritual realities; thus the primary mitzva of returning objects regards this higher second level. However, our Sages acknowledged the importance of orderly and friendly society and in many cases encouraged or required returning an object when only the first kind of ownership persists, because of such considerations as "beyond the letter of the law", sanctification of G^d's name, and so on. (See our column from Vayikra 5762, based on writings of Maharal and Rav Natan of Breslav.)

Rav Kook presents an alternative, and ultimately complementary, explanation of these two levels of obligation. At one level, writes Rav Kook, there is insistence on individual ownership. This is exemplified by the character trait of "mine is mine and yours is yours" (Avot 5:10). While this insistence is important, there need to be limits to private ownership as well.

Indeed, Rav Kook mentions that distinguishing the appropriate extent of private rights in property is one of the most difficult topics in judgment. At some stage, the rights of the individual need to give way to those of the collective. The Torah instructs us that after the owner of the property has already lost both physical and psychic connection with his property, "the Divine consideration tipped the balance in favor of the collective". For this reason, after loss of hope the ownership is collective, meaning that anyone can acquire the object.

Why then is it praiseworthy to return the object even in this case? Rav Kook explains that among the Jewish people, it is usually a fair assumption that the original owner will make at least as good use of the object as the finder. (This is similar to Rav Natan's explanation that the original owner acquires a special Providential role in disposing of his property.) Given that the owner is likely to make better use, and that the finder is not greedy or acquisitive, it just makes sense to return the object, and so this course of action is praiseworthy.

However, if the finder has a firm basis to believe that he can make better use of the object for the common good than the person who lost the object,

then on the contrary, it makes sense for the finder to keep it himself. Thus, returning the object is praiseworthy but not obligatory, since judgment is required to determine the best course of action.

But for mankind as a whole, there is no automatic assumption that the one who lost the object is ideally suited to direct it to its Divine purpose. Indeed, even before loss of hope there is no such presumption. While many people are righteous and G^d-fearing, there are also many individuals who use their possessions in a wasteful or destructive way. Thus, the Torah decreed that among mankind as a whole, ownership passes to the collective as soon as it is lost. However, even in the case of non-Jews we are bidden to exercise our judgment and return the object if it seems to us that this advances HaShem's plan.]

Rav Kook's reference to the mishna in Avot, via the expression "Mine is mine and yours is yours", reminds us that while the first opinion in the mishna calls this an "average approach", the second opinion states that this approach to possession is Sodom - gratuitously possessive. This hints that sometimes we have to go beyond this narrow understanding. Later on, the mishna states that "Mine is yours and yours is mine" represents the approach of "a common person" (am ha'aretz). While this expression usually refers to an ignorant person, Rav Kook in other places explains that this expression can also refer to certain basic, healthy human instincts that are found in common people. (This is how he explains the "common people" who took their lulavim from under the rocks where hostile enemies had placed them on Sukkot - Sukka 43b.) For the masses, the appropriate boundary between individual and collective ownership is tipped more in favor of the collective; in a more advanced and public-minded society, the interests of the collective are not harmed if the balance leans more in favor of the enlightened individual. (Based on Igrot Rayah I:89)

Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book *Meaning in Mitzvot*, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh*.