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TEACHERS :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Teachers and education are in the forefront of the news here in Israel what with the long strike of secondary school teachers and the somewhat disappointing ranking of Israeli school children in certain subject ratings. Even though there is general consensus that money is the problem and the solution I feel that as important as money is, the heart of the problem lies in a far deeper matter and value.

In the current atmosphere of secular Israeli society, basic Jewish values are almost unknown let alone implemented or taught. Maimonides in his great code of Jewish law has an entire section devoted to teaching, teachers, students and the concept of knowledge and education. The basic value is that teachers are to be respected and given honor.

One should rise before one's teacher, speak respectfully to one's teacher, and treat one's teacher with greater probity than even one's parent. The Talmud pithily states that "parents bring a child into this world but a teacher can bring a child into the World to Come" – into a world of spirit, creativity, ideas and self-worth and ultimate immortality.

Thus teaching transcends even parenting, a concept that automatically produces respect and honor for the profession. Teaching has never been a very well paying profession in Jewish life. The tribe of Shimon, who were teachers and scribes, was viewed as the poorest, monetarily, of all of the tribes of Israel. But in a society that does not measure success or honor only in monetary coin, the highest compliment in Israel was that one was called a teacher.

In fact the Talmud itself attributes to God, so to speak, the attribute of being a teacher – "He Who teaches Torah to His people Israel." Even mortal teachers are viewed in Judaism as being engaged in holy work.

But the teacher-student relationship is reciprocal. Maimonides teaches us that in Judaism the teacher-student relationship is really a parent-child relationship. A teacher must not only respect one's students but must love them. Depending on circumstances, this love sometimes can be tough love and sometimes cuddly, fuzzy warmth.

But the student has to somehow be aware that the teacher loves him or her. In an atmosphere of love, much can be accomplished, even under less than ideal physical conditions. I am perplexed why the correct demand of the teachers for smaller number of students in a given class was not buttressed by the opinion of the Talmud in Baba Batra that class size should be restricted to twenty-five for one teacher.

But I should not have been surprised by this for the Israeli secular school system has slowly been divested of any Jewish values and tradition over the decades. Excelling in mathematics and science may not be for everyone but being loved and guided correctly in traditional Jewish life values is for everyone.

Teaching our children that the Bible is somehow a collection of currently irrelevant myths, that the long experience of millennia of Jewish life in the Exile was essentially worthless and that the Jewish mission of being a light unto the nations is restricted to high-tech development and research is a certain recipe for poor educational results and for an eventual dysfunctional society.

The teachers are entitled to a decent salary and to proper physical working conditions. But again Judaism places a high value on personal dedication and preparation in teaching. Education is the 'labor of Heaven.' The Talmud tells us that there is no comparison between reviewing a lesson one hundred and one times than reviewing it only one hundred times. It is always the "extra" that counts most in knowledge, teaching and education generally.

According to Jewish law, halacha has always justified the right of teachers to strike for improvement in educational and financial circumstances. This is especially true in our society where the schools themselves do not control the purse strings and an all powerful central government decides on

these issues. But ultimately the responsibility of all concerned is to the proper education of the children.

The bitter residue of the current dispute will not be easily dissipated even when all of the issues have been settled and decided upon. Again, the rabbis of the Talmud stated that "who is the wise person – one who sees in advance the consequences of one's actions and behavior." A little application of Talmudic wisdom and traditional Jewish educational values will go a long way to help raise our educational system to desired and excellent levels.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYIGASH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

There is no fight as bitter as a family fight. The bitterness and scars remain long after the incident that may have originally sparked it is long since gone and sometimes even forgotten. Many times the bitterness and hard feelings remain even in generations of descendants of the original antagonists, as though somehow genetically transmitted.

Yosef and his brothers reconcile in this week's parsha. But the divisions within the Jewish people then and now are apparently never really healed and forgotten. The commentators point out that the rebellions against Moshe in the desert, that of Korach of the tribe of Levi and Zimri of the tribe of Shimon and Datan and Aviram of the tribe of Reuven, are all part of the residue - of the fallout of the tragedy of the disagreement of Yosef and his brothers.

So too is the tragedy of the splitting of the Jewish people living in the Land of Israel into two disparate and even warring kingdoms after the death of King Shlomo. In fact, the later commentators opine that all later controversies in Jewish life are but an echo of this original controversy between Yosef and his brothers.

The fact that Yaakov in his final words to Shimon and Levi recalls this dispute and its consequences to them only serves to continue the pain and bad feelings that were papered over when Yaakov came down to Egypt. But now that he is gone, the brothers and Yosef remain wary of each other, with the memories of their dispute irrevocably burned into their psyches.

Such is unfortunately the way in family disputes. That is why one must go to all lengths to prevent such disputes, no matter what or how large the seeming cause may be.

Part of the problem, in my opinion, is that in the dispute with Yosef and the brothers, one side –Yosef - was eventually right and the other side – the brothers – seemingly wrong and guilty. This feeling of guilt and being proven wrong only provokes a greater defensive attitude and a determination not to abandon the blind self-justification that led originally to the divisive incident itself.

Contrast this with the disagreements of Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel, numerous and contentious (312 of them) as they were, that never led to any sort of breakup within the society of Israel. There both sides were right, even though as a practical matter, the opinions of Beit Hillel were in the main followed in halachic practice. The Talmud proclaimed that the opinions of both groups were "the words of the living God." By avoiding unnecessary condemnation of Beit Shamai, even though its opinions were not to be adopted and practically implemented, the Talmud guaranteed the harmony of the rabbis and of Jewish society.

Within the framework of halacha and tradition there are many varying opinions. Not all of them can be given equal weight and followed but none of them should be the basis of personal dispute and vilification. The lessons of Yosef and his brothers and their controversy should remain for us as a guide in our times and difficulties as well.

Shabat shalom.

For the week ending 15 December 2007 / 6 Tevet 5768

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Overview

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. G-d communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it is there that G-d will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

Insights

The Prose and the Poetry

“So Yisrael set out with all that he had and came to Beersheva where he slaughtered sacrifices (Zevachim) to the G-d of his father Yitzchak.” (46:1)

It's not by coincidence that the Jews are a middle-Eastern people.

The Middle East was the cradle of civilization; the major history of the world seems to have been played out around the shores of the Mediterranean.

The further you travel from the center of something, the more deviation creeps in from that central point; the further you travel from the nodal point of the Middle East, the more pronounced become two diametrically opposed worldviews.

To the East you will find the asceticism of India, the rejection of the physical, and the aspiration to escape the material world completely by fasting, meditation, and the abnegation of the body.

In the other direction (geographically and spiritually) is the West. While giving a nod to the world of the spirit, the West is heavily invested in the body and its agenda; 'the good life', a life of ease and toys that please.

East is East and West is West - and the genius of Judaism is that it unites these two extremes.

Judaism sees the body neither as a sworn enemy nor as a temple, but as a wayward child in constant need of cajoling, supervision, and encouragement.

It was not only the Jewish People who brought offerings in the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple); non-Jews could, and did bring sacrifices. However, their korbanot were only of one type. They were all olot. An olah is translated as a "burnt offering" so called because it all goes 'up' (oleh) in fire; nothing remains. The non-Jewish mindset is that spirituality demands the total negation of the physical; the physical must go up entirely in a blaze of fire.

The idea that the kohen, together with the one who brings the offering and his or her family, partake of the offering is foreign to the non-Jewish mindset; it seems to smack of a kickback. In fact, the eating of the offering by the kohen and the one who brought the offering were no less important to the process than the parts that fire consumed.

“So Yisrael set out with all that he had and came to Beersheva where he slaughtered sacrifices (Zevachim) to the G-d of his father Yitzchak.”

The zenith of Yaakov's happiness was this journey to Yosef in Mitzraim. After a life beset with troubles, Yaakov finally was about to experience yiddishe naches (parental satisfaction) from all his children.

In Beersheva, the last town before the Egyptian border, he brought zevachim to Hashem.

It seems that none of our ancestors brought zevachim; they only brought olot.

A zevach is a shared family experience, an offering in which the entire family partakes. With Yaakov's family circle complete, the stage was set for the Children of Yisrael to become the nation that would proclaim the service of G-d through the uniting of the body and the soul. Thus Yaakov could experience the higher level of Divine service in which even the prose of physical existence - eating and drinking - could be elevated into the Divine poetry of serving G-d.

Based on Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch

Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas Vayigash

Dedicated in honor of Mordechai Spolter's 30th Birthday, by his loving wife and kids.

Don't Rehash The Story of My Sale To Egypt

When Yosef sent his brothers back to Canaan to deliver the message to Yaakov that his long lost son was still alive and well in Egypt, Yosef instructed them: "Do not quarrel on the road" (al tirgazu b'derech) [Bereshis 45:24]. Rashi, quoting Chazal, interprets the words "al tirgazu b'derech" to mean: "do not engage in halachic discussion, so that the trip does not become a source of agitation for you."

This instruction, as interpreted by Chazal, would seem to contradict a well known and explicit Biblical pasuk referring to words of Torah: "You shall teach them to your children and speak of them when you dwell at home and WHEN YOU WALK ON THE ROAD, when you retire and when you arise." [From the first paragraph of Krias Shma – Devorim 6:7].

The simple and most likely correct resolution of this contradiction is that it all depends what type of learning one is engaged in. To listen to Torah tapes while traveling on the road is certainly permissible. However, getting involved in complex and demanding analysis of complicated Talmudic passages should be avoided lest one become distracted from his travels and have an accident.

However, I recently saw a homiletic interpretation in the sefer Pri Tevua: There is never anything wrong with discussing Daf Yomi or the weekly Torah portion while traveling on the road. On the contrary, it is appropriate to have such discussions. However, in this case, Yosef was steering his brothers away from having discussion about one particular halacha. He did not want them to start re-analyzing the appropriateness of their actions regarding his sale.

When the brothers originally sold Yosef, they arrived at that course of action following extensive discussion and after having concluded that their actions were legally appropriate (halacha l'ma'aseh)! They convened a Beis Din [Jewish Court] and they ruled concerning Yosef that he had the status of a "pursuer" (rodef) who must be put away before he does them mortal harm.

The Torah teaches that following the incident where they threw Yosef into the pit, "they sat and ate bread" [Bereshis 37:25]. What is the import of this statement?

Our Sages tell us that when a Jewish Court deliberates on life or death matters, they must fast. They must remain fasting until they arrive at a final decision on the matter. The above referenced pasuk [verse] teaches that the brothers convened a Beis Din to decide Yosef's fate. They fasted all the while they were deliberating. It was only after they arrived at a conclusion and executed their judgment that they sat down to break their fast and have a meal of bread.

Now the brothers were reunited with Yosef in Egypt in one of the most dramatic and compelling scenes in the entire Torah when Yosef identified himself to his brothers. Yosef asked if his father is still alive. Yosef cried.

The brothers cried. The brothers now saw that they were wrong. They saw that Yosef was not a rodef, but was interested in their well-being all along. In such a situation, normal people — 10 brothers who collectively made such a terrible mistake — would likely start looking for scapegoats. Yosef could see all too well that as soon as they got on the road, the brothers would start pointing fingers at one another: "It was your fault!" "You're the one that said this!" "You're the one who said that!" He foresaw a great controversy amongst them all over again.

He therefore instructed them: "Don't get involved in matters of THIS halacha!" Don't review the whole matter of whether based on halacha you were right or you were wrong in throwing me into the pit or in selling me! Yosef knew that Divine Providence (Hashgacha Pratis) directed the events as they unfolded. It would be fruitless for the brothers to try to assign blame to one another for merely being agents in carrying out the Divine Plan. Don't point fingers. It was nobody's fault here. The whole sequence of events is enveloped in mystery. Such mysteries are not to be understood by man. Don't dwell on this and do not even discuss it on the way back home!

The Beis Yisrael, the Gerer Rebbe, writes that this interpretation fits in well with Rashi's famous comment on the words "And [Yaakov] saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." [Bereshis 45:27]. Rashi explains that the wagons (agalos) were a coded message to Yaakov that Yosef remembered that when they were last together, they studied the laws of the Decapitated Calf (Eglah Arufa).

What coded message Rashi is referring to? The essence of the chapter of Eglah Arufa is the unsolved mystery (lo noda). It is not known who is responsible for the murder victim found on the road. The facts are simply not known. Yosef sent his father this very message: What happened to me is a mystery. That is why he instructed his brothers not to start arguing with one another about who was right and who was wrong. Lo Noda. The rationale remains unknown. For some reason, this is the way G-d wanted it to happen and this is how it did happen. The brothers should not feel responsible for what they did. Therefore, he told them: "don't rehash it and don't regurgitate it."

G-d Did Not Want Yaakov To Remain In Canaan

The Torah says: "So Israel set out with all that he had and he came to Beer-Sheva where he slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak.

G-d spoke to Israel in night visions and He said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov' and he responded 'Here I am.' And He said 'I am the G-d – G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you there as a great nation.'" [Bereshis 46:1-3]

There is an interesting Medrash on this passage:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: I have inquired of all the masters of Agadah in the south to explain this pasuk to me. "Why does the pasuk mention specifically that he is slaughtering sacrifices to the "G-d of his father Yitzchak" and not mention the "G-d of his father Avraham" or the "G-d of his fathers" in general?" No one could give me an answer. But when I came to the Rabbis of the Galilee and to Rabbi Yochanan in Teverya they answered me that a person must honor his father more than his grandfather.

The Medrash remains difficult. We understand that it would be inappropriate to bring a sacrifice only to the "G-d of his grandfather Avraham". But what would have been so wrong if it mentioned that he brought sacrifices to both the G-d of his father Yitzchak AND to the G-d of his grandfather, Avraham?

The following interpretation basically appears in the Sforno, but it is elaborated upon in the book Kometz HaMincha from Rav Chanoch Ehrentroy.

Yaakov Avinu is told that he should come down to Egypt because there was a famine in Canaan. Yaakov thinks to himself: This has happened in my family before. There was a famine previously in the days of my grandfather Avraham and he went down to Egypt. There was another famine in the days of my father Yitzchak and he did not go down to Egypt. He debated – what should I do? Should I do as my grandfather did and go down to Egypt or should I do as my father did and remain in Canaan?

He concluded that the best plan would be to go down to Beer Sheva where Yitzchak had built an altar. "I will go there and offer a sacrifice and try to be inspired to act as my father acted because I am more duty-bound to show honor and emulate the ways of my father than I am duty bound to show honor and emulate the ways of my grandfather."

That is why he brought a sacrifice to the "G-d of his father Yitzchak." This is what the Medrash means: "a person is more obliged to honor his father than his grandfather."

It is in light of this interpretation that we can now fully understand the import of the third pasuk in the above quoted passage: "I am the G-d – G-d of your father." I am the One who told Yitzchak not to go down to Egypt. But to you I say: "Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

The Sforno explains the difference between why G-d did not want Yitzchak to go down to Egypt and why He wanted Yaakov to go down to Egypt: "If your children remain in Canaan, they will marry Canaanite daughters and become assimilated with them. In Egypt, this will not happen because the Egyptians detest the Hebrews — they cannot even eat bread with them" (due to the fact that the gods of the Egyptians were sheep and the children of Yaakov were shepherds). Since the Egyptians would not break bread with them and would not socialize with them, they would not intermarry.

We see the extraordinary wisdom of Chazal from this idea. Our Sages prohibited Pas Akum [eating Gentile bread] lest it lead to intermarriage. Eating leads to socialization and socialization leads to intermarriage. If the eating is restricted, the socialization will be restricted and ultimately intermarriage and assimilation will be restricted as well.

In Egypt, where the Jews were an anathema to the population, they would not intermarry, but they would become a great nation. That is why, despite what G-d commanded Yaakov's father Yitzchak, G-d commanded Yaakov to go down to Egypt.

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

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h a a r e t z

Portion of the Week / Grafting Judah onto Joseph

By Benjamin Lau

The midrash in Genesis Rabbah (section 93) describes the opening of this week's portion, when Judah confronts Joseph, as a war between two monarchs that shakes the earth's very foundations. Although this war ends in a fraternal hug, the struggle for national leadership has been an integral part of Jewish history for thousands of years. The Bible is full of explicit and implicit references to the struggle between Judah's descendants and Joseph's. When Israel's tribes march through the desert toward the Promised Land, Israelite protocol places the tribe of Joseph on the western flank and the tribe of Judah on the eastern; they are the nation's two poles. When Jeroboam, son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim (one of Joseph's sons), rebels against King Solomon (one of the sons of David, who was from the tribe of Judah), we hear the declaration, "What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel" (1 Kings 12:16). The kingdom of Israel subsequently splits into two kingdoms whose capitals are Jerusalem and Samaria respectively.

For centuries, these two kingdoms coexisted; sometimes they fought, sometimes they lived together in peace and, in a few isolated eras, in fraternal love. Taking this background into consideration, we can understand this week's Haftara reading from the Book of Ezekiel: "Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah,

and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand" (Ezekiel 37:16-19).

The classical commentators describe the prophecy as the joining together of two wooden boards. Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi) thought Ezekiel was depicting a miracle. Other commentators interpret the passage in terms of artistic wood-working. The most beautiful interpretation I have ever heard for this prophecy was uttered by Nogah Hareuveni, of blessed memory, founder of the Neot Kedumim biblical park not far from the city of Modi'in, who recently passed away. According to Hareuveni, Ezekiel is describing a process of grafting, where we graft part of one tree, the graft (rohev or "rider" in Hebrew), to another, the stock, to create a superior tree. The tissues of graft and stock merge to form a new kind of tree. Farmers engage in grafting to merge a desired quality in the stock, such as resistance to harsh environmental conditions, with a desired quality in the graft, such as its high degree of fertility or superb fruit.

In Ezekiel's vision, the stock is Joseph and the graft Judah. The prophet envisions the future merging of all Israel's tribes. Only through Judah's grafting to Joseph can the tribes become a sturdy tree that will bear fruit. Joseph is "he that sold to all the people of the land" (Genesis 42:6), but his leadership did not produce excellent fruit, although its roots are sturdy. Joseph had the political insight to send forth roots and take firm hold of the earth; this is how he governed Egypt and this is how the monarchs of Israel ruled their subjects: Jeroboam, Ahab and Jeroboam II were excellent kings whose reign benefited their nation. Given their sturdiness, they are suitable to be the stock, not the graft: The kingdom of Israel's culture absorbed its neighbors' pagan culture. The fruits Joseph's trees yielded were bitter. In contrast, "Judah was his sanctuary" (Psalms 114:2): The kingdom of Judah produced kings of a truly noble spirit who, however, could not establish their rule on firm ground. The best illustration of this is Josiah, who tried to initiate religious reforms but was killed in the battle of Megiddo.

The prophet Ezekiel, who lived several decades after Josiah's death, believes the situation can be remedied only through the grafting of Judah onto Joseph - the good government with solid earthly and spiritual roots. This is how Jewish philosophy developed the two-messiahs concept: one descended from Joseph, the other from David. In 1904, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoen Kook immigrated to Palestine, settling in Jaffa. Two months after moving to his new home, he was asked to participate in the funeral of the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl. Rabbi Kook's "Eulogy in Jerusalem" is a fundamental document succinctly expressing religious Zionism's ideology. He states that Herzl was a messiah from the House of Joseph but that Judah must be grafted onto Joseph. The nation's cultural and educational network must draw inspiration from the Jewish people's eternal sources: the Bible, the wisdom of thousands of years of Jewish thought, and the "foundry of the nation's soul" (to use the phrase coined by Haim Nahman Bialik).

More than a century has since passed. The "stock" has taken firm root: The Jewish national home's practical aspects - its economic and industrial bases - are certainly satisfactory. However, the state of the "graft" is a matter of grave concern. Sometimes, we hear angry cries about a religious establishment that sees itself as a patron that is the graft that has been joined to the stock of secular Zionism. This cultural struggle over the identity of the "graft" in Israeli society is vital for the consolidation of an Israeli Jewish culture. The parable of the full cart taking precedence over the empty one provides no opportunity for an enrichment of the nation's spirit. Apparently, it will take several more years before we can reach a consensus on the formula for the nature of the "graft" capable of bearing the desired fruit. To paraphrase the Mishnah's Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), although we ourselves cannot complete the task, we are not at liberty to shirk our responsibility to engage in it.

Nesivos Shalom

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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Parshas Vayigash 5768

A Paradigm For Tefilah 1

In Yehudah's plaintive plea before the mysterious figure who turns out to be Yosef, the Zohar finds a paradigm for effective davening. Indeed, Yehudah's words are laden with allusions to proper prayer.

The Mishna² instructs us to daven in a mood of gravity and seriousness, of koved rosh. The Magid of Mezerich explicated this phrase somewhat unconventionally, seeing in the word rosh/ chief a reference to Hashem Himself. Optimally, we should daven not for our self-interest, but for the bit of the Divine that is resident in each of us, the fulfillment of the promise "I will be with him in distress."³ Koved rosh, seen this way, means the weightiness, the burden of pain borne by the Rosh, by Hashem Himself, when He feels the pain of the person who, as it were, hosts His presence. Yehudah's words allude to this. "Bee adonee" – or my Lord is bee, within me.

Toldos Yaakov Yosef spoke of a king who, in a moment of great joy, guaranteed that all requests made to him would be granted. The results were as expected. Some asked for power and honor; others for wealth. Each person's wish was granted, exactly as he asked. One wise man, however, offered that nothing meant more to him than the privilege of being able to speak personally with the king three times a day. The king was exceedingly pleased with this request, and ordered not only that the wise man should have the access to him that he wished, but that the royal treasure house be opened for him, so that he might take all he wanted. We can see this too in Yehudah's words: "May your servant please speak a word in the ears of my lord," i.e. what I ask is simply that I be able to turn to You in prayer, that my mind and heart be opened so that I can pour out my heart in Your presence.

"Do not be angry with Your servant." The Zohar amplifies upon a verse in Vayikra 4 "And his sin becomes known to him." How does sin become known, asks the Zohar? Through His din. The suffering that ensues from Divine judgment raises our consciousness of our misdeeds. Rav Yosi, however, offers a different view, continues the Zohar. The Torah makes sin known. When a person attempts to learn, and fails to feel the supernal Light of the Torah; when a person does not get to feel the Light of davening or his general service of Hashem, he comprehends that something within him is amiss, and this blocks him from feeling what he so desperately seeks. Rav Yosi's option seems more palatable to us, and it too is reflected in Yehudah's words, "Do not be angry." In other words, if You need to wake us up, let it not be through the manifestation of your displeasure with us through pain and suffering, but through the gentler modality of cues we detect while learning Your Torah.

The Bais Avrohom further elaborates on the thought we mentioned earlier, that by right a person ought to daven for the portion of the Divine within us. He taught – and he groaned and trembled when he did so – that there is good advice for the person whose prayers are not being answered. The advice, however, is extremely difficult to implement. It calls for a person ridding himself of his entire personal stake and agenda, and davening instead entirely for the Divine Presence within.

Such an approach is clearly the province of very great people, and not of ordinary ones. Yet, from the fact that our parshah here is taken as a template for prayer in general, we are forced to conclude that somehow this method applies to every Jew, in all sorts of backgrounds and conditions. We can apply the words of the Bais Avrohom, wringing yet another level of meaning from the aforementioned pasuk in Tehilim. "He will call upon Me and I will answer him; I am with him in distress; I will release him and bring him honor." The word "call" here implies calling from a distance, from afar. When a person calls to Hashem as if He were distant, then all Hashem does is answer him. Should that person fully feel that "I am with him in distress," that Hashem is never really distant from him, then Hashem pledges far more: to release him from his oppressive bonds, and bring him honor in their place. The common, ordinary person can indeed relate to this. But if he cannot let go of all of his own concerns and feelings in favor of focusing on the pain of the Shechinah, he can at least include this concern in his prayer, alongside all his other concerns. (Similarly, we make our prayer less egocentric by routinely including the needs of all other Jewish brethren. While we are not on a spiritual plane lofty enough to set aside all our personally-felt neediness, we still manage

to elevate our prayer by joining the needs of others with our own. We can learn to do the same for the portion of the Divine within us, by including it in our thoughts instead of ignoring it altogether.

The meaning of the continuation of Yehudah's monologue becomes clearer. "My lord asked his servant saying, do you have a father or a brother?" He alludes here to two distinct stances of prayer. We can pray on a level that can be called "father," i.e. davening exclusively for the pain, *kivayachol*, of our Father. Alternatively, our prayer can be brotherly, feeling the needs of our brethren as much as our own.

The Ari z"l taught that it was important, before each prayer, to formally accept upon ourselves the *mitzvah* of loving all Jews as ourselves. This turns our davening into a very different kind of experience. We no longer are the selfish petitioners, clamoring for our own interests while offering nothing in return. We ask instead for a more noble cause. Additionally, the Heavenly prosecutorial forces can interpose themselves between prayers offered for ourselves in the narrow sense – but they have no relevance to the community as a whole.

The Noam Elimelech's son R' Elazar once attended the table of R' Baruch of Mezbozh. At some point, R' Elazar spontaneously exclaimed, "Oy, Tateh (Father)!" R' Baruch responded sharply to him. "And what if He is not your Father?" The words affected him greatly. Relating them to his earthly father, the Noam Elimelech told him, "You should have answered, 'Ask of your Father!,'"⁵ because even when a Jew does not merit these lofty levels, he can at least "borrow" them⁶. When a Jew toils to achieve these levels, Hashem as it were "lends" them to him artificially, even though they are beyond his reach to acquire them by himself.

Yehudah says, "And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father...'" In truth, these levels are already deeply seated within us, already seasoned and aged within our souls. Within its precincts, all spiritual levels lie tantalizingly close and attainable. Minimally, we can ask for an "advance" on them, even when we have not fully actualized them and made them fully our own. In the process, our prayer becomes much more meaningful and acceptable.

1 Based on Nesivos Shalom, pgs. 277-279

2 Berachos 30B

3 Tehilim 91:15 He takes this to mean that the *chelek aloka milemaal*, the portion of G-d from Above, does not depart a person in his distress, so that *kivayachol*, the Shechinah feels the pain as well

4 Vayikra 4:23

5 Devarim 32:7

6 The word *sha-al* means both "ask" and "borrow."

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Rabbi Shlomo Aviner

Parashat Vayigash 5768

Parashat Vayigash - I Feel Your Pain

"Then he [Yosef] fell on his brother Binyamin's neck and wept, and Binyamin wept upon his neck" (Bereshit 45:14). "And he [Yosef] wept" - over the two Temples that would stand in the territory of Binyamin and would be destroyed, and Binyamin wept over the Tabernacle of Shiloh that would stand in the territory of Yosef and would be destroyed (Rashi).

Why did they weep then, at a time of joy, over future destruction? And why did each one weep over the destruction in the other's territory and not in his own territory?

As is known, the Temples were destroyed on account of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). When Yosef and Binyamin met, they realized that the separation between them up to now was caused by baseless hatred, and they foresaw the future destruction, which would also be a result of baseless hatred. They therefore wept.

The spiritual repair of baseless hatred is the great strengthening of mutual love to the point where another person's pain is greater than one's own pain. Each one therefore wept over the other's destruction, which teaches and proves that each one of them cared more about the other's destruction than his own. Even though Binyamin's Temples could not be built until after the destruction of Yosef's Tabernacle, Binyamin nonetheless wept

over the destruction of Yosef's Tabernacle, since he preferred that his Temples not be built if it meant that the other's sanctuary would be destroyed. This love contains in it the ability to be a spiritual cure for baseless hatred (based on *Me'eina shel Torah* in the name of Ha-Rav Ha-Kadosh Y. Mikazmir z"l). - Tal Chermon

Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi: Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook Honoring Parents

Our Rabbi would stand before his mother, and when he would separate from her he would walk backwards.

Our Rabbi's mother needed to send him a message to remind him that he needed to eat. When our Rabbi reached the age of bar mitzvah, he informed his mother that from now on he did not want her to determine what he ate, but he would decide on his own. Nevertheless, when there were days that she saw him and touched her finger on cookies that were on the table, he immediately took from them and ate in order to provide her with contentment.

Netilat Yadayim (Ritually washing hands)

- One day, before *netilat yadayim*, Our Rabbi said: "Blessed is Hashem, a meeting with King Shlomo," on account of a recognition and feeling that King Shlomo, who established *netilat yadayim*, was there (see Shabbat 14b and Rambam, *Hilchot Avot Ha-Tumah* 8:8).

Rav Aviner's article from this week's parashah sheet "Be-Ahava U-Be-Emuna" of Machon Meir (Translated by Rafael Blumberg)

It's a Mitzvah to Take Part in the Strike

[The teacher's strike in Israel which began around Rosh Hashanah is entering its fourth month]

Obviously, the ideal is to solve labor disputes not through strikes but through rapprochement, arbitration or a court decision. One should not rush to use the weapon of strikes.

Yet if one side refuses to talk, or to turn to arbitration, or to honor a decision of arbitration, it is permissible to use the weapon of a strike in order to force that side to agree to talk or to arbitration or to agree to a decision arrived at through arbitration.

This principle applies today regarding the school teachers, who are arguing that they do not receive enough of a salary, and that to the contrary, the strike is in the pupils' best interests. After all, if the teachers cannot earn a respectable living, many will not turn to this profession. Moreover, some will leave teaching. Also, due to the burden on teachers, who have to work many hours to earn a good living, the students are not going to receive the full care that they require.

Therefore, even though during the strike the students lose out, in the long run, they will benefit. Amongst our communal leadership, some do calculate the minor loss in the present versus the great benefit for the future – and this whether the pupils forfeit secular study or Torah study, for regarding both types of students, the same calculation applies.

And certainly a teacher cannot argue that he will not take part in a strike since either way it is going to take place. If one teacher is obligated, then all are obligated. If others do as he does, the strike will collapse. Regarding such thinking, it says, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man." If you strike, you don't want other teachers not to strike. Or, in the philosophical language of Kant, morality must be "universalized". In other words, in any moral dilemma, you must determine how matters will be if everyone behaves like you, and you must see yourself as a universal legislator whose behavior will serve as a yardstick for everyone. Therefore, every teacher must participate in the strike, both those teachers teaching secular subjects and those teaching religious subjects.

Yet since the pupils need to study, since their roaming around free is harmful and even dangerous, and since the teacher is free due to the strike, he has a moral obligation to give of his time to his students so as to advance them. In other words, he should provide them with informal study which is unconnected to the regular study regimen and which can be held in an informal location.

We have to hope and pray that the strike will improve the state of our children's education.

One might ask: How can a teacher knowingly participate in a strike that brings Torah learning to a halt? This is an important question. Surely the Rabbis said that we do not cancel children's Torah learning even to build the Temple. Yet educational considerations lead us to cancel Torah learning for many things, such as... youth activities and the struggle over Eretz Yisrael.

Yet in the case at hand, let it be said that canceling those Torah studies is what will allow them to survive. After all, the present situation of the teachers' poverty and the crowdedness of the classrooms is leading to the loss of much Torah learning. It constitutes the worst neglect of Torah that there could be. Therefore, our great halachic decisors have allowed Torah-teachers' strikes under certain circumstances where there is no choice, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, Rabbi Chaim David HaLevi, and – among those alive today – Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

Moreover, should someone argue, "I, as a teacher, have no complaints. I receive a fair wage and in the institution where I teach all is well," he is still part of the Jewish People, which includes not just the rich but the poor as well. Providing good public education is literally a matter of "pikuach nefesh" – not just physical life and death, but spiritual life and death – for the nation. Hence no one can say, "All is well with me". Rather, he must enlist in the struggle on behalf of good education for the entire nation. Morality and self-sacrifice demand no less. And in these days of the strike, we must be strong and courageous on behalf of our children's education.

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Vayigash - Translation of the Torah
Rabbi Asher Meir**

One of the tragedies which is commemorated by the fast on the Tenth of Tevet is the Septuagint, the translation of the Tora into Greek by seventy scholars. This translation was aided by miraculous Divine inspiration which harmonized the translations of the various scholars. And it is because of this translation that the only translation of the Torah which fulfills the obligation of the Torah reading is this Greek translation. Our Sages even saw in this translation a fulfillment of the verse, "G-d widened the way for Yefet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (Yefet represents Greece, and Shem represents Israel - Taanit 9a-9b). We may also point out that HaShem commanded Moshe to translate the Torah into the languages of the seventy nations (Devarim 27:8 and Rashi's commentary).

Even so, the day that the Greeks compelled us to translate the Torah is considered a great national tragedy. "On the eighth of Tevet the Torah was translated into Greek in the time of King Ptolemy, and the world was dark for three days" (SA OC 480:2 from Megillat Taanit). Another source states that the day that Ptolemy first had the Torah translated into Greek was as harsh to Israel as the day the Golden Calf was made (Soferim 1:7, Sefer Torah 1:6).

Rabbi Eliahu Ki Tov likens this to a lion trapped in a cage. The Greeks felt they had "trapped" the mighty Torah by translating it; they no longer were in awe of it (Sefer HaTodaah). They didn't know that the Torah could not be adequately translated and that all they had trapped was a likeness.

The same ambivalent attitude towards translation can be found in other contexts. For instance, the Shulchan Arukh permits saying prayers in any language (OC 101:4). Allowing prayers to be said in the vernacular allows us to bring the mitzvot to those who are far from Torah and never learned Hebrew.

Yet the Mishna Berura warns that today we shouldn't allow this to become a habit. For this leniency can also have the opposite effect: instead of bringing the distant Jews close to Torah, it can drag the prayers away from Torah! Once the prayers are entrapped in a foreign language, then they can be used or abused according to people's whims; the next step may be to edit out parts of the prayer service which are not to the liking of exactly those Jews who are steeped in a foreign language and culture (MB 101:13).

Translation opens up a "two-way street" into and out of a culture of devotion to Torah.

The Splendor Of Secular Wisdom

The translation of the Torah is often associated in Chasidic literature with the concept of "nogah" or "glow". This term comes from the vision of Yechezkel, who saw a stormy wind, a great cloud, and an igniting fire – all hostile forces; and then "a glow surrounding" (Yechezkel 1:4). This "glow" is part of the same vision as the other three, suggesting a connection to evil, yet a glow is not something negative. This "glow" is a symbol of all those aspects of our world which have a potential for both good and evil.

Examples are permissible food, which can be used positively to strengthen the body or to cause appreciation of HaShem's bounty, or negatively to sink in material pleasures.

These four visions are also connected to the four kingdoms which ruled Israel, where the fourth kingdom is Greece (Tanchuma on Bamidbar 19:2). So not only the Greek translation, but also the Greek culture, which was devoted to secular wisdom and beauty, can be identified with this quality. Secular wisdom can be a gateway to Torah, by occupying the mind with the beauty and intricacy of HaShem's creation; but it can also be GF a gate in the other direction, and a reason for mourning and fasting.

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*.

**R. Joshua Flug (YUTorah.org)
Rosh Kollel of the Boca Raton Community Kollel
The Prohibition against Wearing Garments Containing Sha'atnez**

Part I

The Torah (Vayikra 19:19 and Devarim 22:11) prohibits wearing a garment containing sha'atnez. The Torah defines sha'atnez as a combination of wool and linen. In this week's issue, we will discuss the process necessary to produce sha'atnez as well as some practical applications. Next week's issue will discuss the parameters of the prohibition against wearing a garment that contains (or may contain) sha'atnez.

What Constitutes Sha'atnez?

The Midrash, Sifra, Parshat Kedoshim 2:4, comments on the term "sha'atnez" and states that it is derived from the conjugation of three words: shua (combed or carded), tavui (spun) and noz (woven). The Midrash states that for this reason, felt (derived from fibers that are pressed together without the combing, spinning or weaving process) is excluded from the biblical prohibition against wearing sha'atnez. The Gemara, Niddah 61b, cites a dispute regarding the necessity for shua, tavui and noz. Mar Zutra is of the opinion that without all three of these components, a garment is not subject to the biblical prohibition against wearing sha'atnez. If only one of these components exists in the garment, there is only a rabbinic prohibition against wearing the garment. Rav Ashi disagrees and maintains that even if one of these components exists, there is a biblical prohibition against wearing the garment.

Our version of the Gemara rules in favor of Mar Zutra. However, Rambam, Hilchot Eidut 10:3, rules that one violates the biblical prohibition against wearing sha'atnez even if the garment contains only one of the aforementioned components. Taz, Yoreh De'ah 301:1, notes that apparently Rambam's version of the Gemara did not contain the statement that rules in favor of Mar Zutra.

R. Ya'akov B. Zolty, Mishnat Ya'avetz, Yoreh De'ah no. 24, notes that the dispute between Mar Zutra and Rav Ashi may be reflective of a broader issue concerning the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez. R. Zolty explains that according to Mar Zutra, sha'atnez is defined as a garment of mixed wool and linen. In order for a garment to be defined as a garment of mixed wool and linen, the wool and linen must undergo the requisite process to produce a garment (i.e. combing, spinning and weaving). Rav Ashi, however, does not define sha'atnez as a garment of mixed wool and

linen. Rather, he defines sha'atnez as the coexistence of wool and linen in the same garment. Even if the wool and linen were not combed or spun, if both are woven into the same garment, that garment is one that contains both wool and linen and is subject to the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez.

[Rashi, Niddah 61b, s.v. Shua and VTavui, is of the opinion that according to Mar Zutra the wool and linen must combed together, spun together and woven together in order constitute sha'atnez. R. Zolty explains that Rashi is of the opinion that sha'atnez is defined as a fusion of wool and linen in a garment. In order to attain that status, the wool and linen must be mixed together from their inception. Tosafot, Niddah 61b, s.v. Shua, disagree with Rashi's interpretation. One of Tosafot's objections is that the Gemara, Yevamot 4b, states that a linen talit with wool tzitzit strings tied on constitutes sha'atnez and is only permissible if the wool is techelet (blue string). This certainly does not fit Rashi's criteria for sha'atnez. R Zolty notes that Ra'avad, who seems to agree with Rashi, answers this question in his Commentary on Sifra, Parshat Kedoshim 2:4:18. Ra'avad suggests that if one ties wool onto a linen garment or vice versa that garment is considered sha'atnez. Tying wool and linen together is more stringent than weaving them together and is an exception to the regular rule that the wool and linen must be combed together, spun together and woven together in order to constitute sha'atnez.]

R. Zolty notes that Rambam, who follows the opinion of Rav Ashi, is consistent in his opinion regarding a number of issues. First, Rambam, Hilchot K'laim 10:9, rules that if a garment made of other materials contains one thread of wool on one side of the garment and one thread of linen on the other side of the garment, the garment is subject to the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez. Rabbeinu Asher, Hilchot K'laim no. 15, rules that such a garment is not subject to the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez. R. Zolty explains that Rambam, who follows the opinion of Rav Ashi, defines sha'atnez as a garment containing wool and linen. Therefore, even if the wool and linen are not mixed together, the garment is subject to the prohibition against wearing sha'atnez. However, Rabbeinu Asher, Hilchot K'laim no. 2, rules in accordance with the opinion of Mar Zutra, and therefore, defines sha'atnez as a garment of mixed wool and linen. Since the wool and linen are not mixed together, there is no prohibition against wearing sha'atnez.

Second, the Gemara, Niddah 61b, states that if one thread gets mixed into a garment and is no longer identifiable, it can render the entire garment sha'atnez. Rashi, Temurah 34a, s.v. Livtil, asks: there is a concept of nullification which states that if one thread of prohibited material (e.g. the wool of a bechor) is woven into a garment and is no longer identifiable, the thread is considered nullified and is of no concern (Temurah 34a). Why then, is there a concern of sha'atnez when one thread is mixed into the garment? Rashi answers that sha'atnez is defined as a prohibition derived through mixing wool and linen and therefore, nullification cannot apply to sha'atnez as it would undermine the whole concept of sha'atnez. R. Zolty explains that Rashi is consistent in defining sha'atnez as a garment of mixed wool and linen. Therefore, he disallows nullification of even a single thread. However, Rambam, Hilchot Eidut 10:3, states explicitly that the prohibition against wearing a garment that is rendered sha'atnez due to a single thread that is mixed in is only rabbinic in nature. This implies that on a biblical level, a single thread is nullified if it is no longer identifiable. Rambam is consistent in his opinion. Since he does not define sha'atnez as a function of a mixture, the regular rules of nullification are applicable.

Reprocessed Fibers

R. Zolty's analysis provides an important insight into the status of reprocessed fibers. Reprocessed fibers are a collection of various fibers and may contain wool fibers and linen fibers. According to Rambam, if a garment is created using reprocessed fibers and one thread is wool and one is linen, the entire garment is sha'atnez. According to Rabbeinu Asher, there is no concern for sha'atnez unless the wool and linen threads are actually woven together.

Based on R. Zolty's analysis, the reason why Rambam rules that a garment with one thread of wool in one part of the garment and one thread of linen in another is considered sha'atnez is that sha'atnez is defined as the

coexistence of wool and linen in the same garment. However, that very definition is what allows Rambam to allow for the nullification of threads on a biblical level when they are not recognizable within the mixture. As such, according to Rambam, the question one must ask is: what is the likelihood that there is one linen thread in the mixture (it is likely that there is wool in the mixture)? Since according to Rambam, the question is only rabbinic in nature, if there is enough of a doubt whether there is a linen thread in the garment at all, one may be lenient based on the principal of safek d'rabanan l'kula (one may be lenient on questions of doubt in rabbinic law). According to those who disagree with Rambam, the laws of sha'atnez do not allow for the nullification of threads and the question is of biblical nature. However, defining sha'atnez as a garment of mixed wool and linen requires that the wool and linen are actually mixed together in order to constitute sha'atnez. Therefore, the question is: what is the likelihood that a wool thread is woven together with a linen thread? If the likelihood is less than a mi'ut hamatzui (approximately ten percent, see "The Requirement to Check Food for Insects"), one does not need to be concerned about the small possibility that the garment contains such a mixture.

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Ohr Somayach :: The Weekly Daf :: Ketubot 109 - Nedarim 4 For the week ending 15 December 2007 / 6 Tevet 5768

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Ecology and Economy

Where is it preferable to live -- in a town or in a big city? Small-town dwellers and suburbanites will give you one answer, while the denizens of a metropolis will give you another. The truth, of course, is that a good case can be made for both. The halachic ramifications of this sociological reflection are whether a man can force his wife to move from town to city or vice versa.

The mishna clearly states that a husband cannot compel his wife to leave a town and come live with him in the city, nor to leave the city and live with him in a town. Objection to moving from city to town is readily understood, observes the gemara, because everything is available in a metropolis. But why should a woman object to moving from a town to a city?

The answer given is based on an observation made by Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina that it is difficult to be a city-dweller. The historical proof of this observation is the account we find of the settling of Eretz Yisrael by the exiles returning from Babylon. Although most of the people were more interested in establishing their homes in towns throughout the land, their leader, Nechemia, was determined to see that Jerusalem would be sufficiently populated. He therefore ordered that lots be drawn to designate which tenth of the total population would be assigned to live in Jerusalem, and he appealed for volunteers beyond that number. His appeal won a positive response, "And the people blessed all those who had volunteered to live in Jerusalem." (Nechemia 11:2)

What is so difficult about living in a big city that deserved such a special blessing and which serves as grounds for a wife refusing to move there?

Rashi explains that because of the large population in the city, the houses are crowded together with little air available to their residents, in contrast to the town where fields and orchards adjoining the homes provide a pleasant atmosphere. Metzudot David on Nechemia and Tiferet Yisrael on the mishna suggest that the difficulty of city life lies also in the high cost of living there. It is the wife's prerogative to favor the positive aspects of either town or city in her choice of where to live. Ketubot 110b

The Sages' Love of the Land

The final pages of Mesechta Ketubot describe the great love which the Talmudic Sages had for Eretz Yisrael. Let us cite two examples:

Rabbi Chanina picked up stones that were on the road. Tosefot explains his action based on a Midrash (Tanchuma Parashat Shlach) describing this sage's journey from Babylon to Eretz Yisrael. There were no border signs in those days indicating where the Holy Land began, so Rabbi Chanina developed his own test. He picked up a stone and felt its weight. Finding it too light, he realized that he had not yet reached his destination. When he

finally picked up some stones that had substance, he realized that he was in Eretz Yisrael. He kissed those stones and recited the passage, "For Your servants desired her stones, and its dust found favor in their eyes." (Tehillim 102:5)

Rashi, however, has another interpretation which ties in with the following piece of gemara. Rabbi Chanina, he explains, was already in Eretz Yisrael and his lifting stones had a different purpose. His love of the land was so great that he was anxious to see that no one could fault it for having poor roads. He therefore went about removing stones and other obstacles from the roads.

That same sort of consideration seems to be the motive of Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi who, in order to find comfort in the shade, would leave the place where they were studying Torah when the sun's rays became too hot. On cold days they would move from their unheated place to where they could enjoy the warmth of the sun. They did so, explains Rashi, so that they would never have cause to complain even about the climate in Eretz Yisrael.

But wouldn't any one of us move from an uncomfortable place to a comfortable one? What is so remarkable about the behavior of these sages? The answer is that they could certainly have continued studying despite a little discomfort, while moving necessitated a loss of precious time spent in intense Torah study. They nevertheless made that sacrifice so that it should never occur to them that there was something imperfect about living in the Eretz Yisrael they so loved. Ketubot 112b

Ohr Somayach :: Talmudigest :: Ketubot 106 - 112
For the week ending 15 December 2007 / 6 Tevet 5768
by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach
The Bankrupt Father of the Bride
Where is bankruptcy mentioned in the Talmud?

The Hebrew term for one who bankrupts is poshet regel which literally translates as "sticking out the foot". In our mishneh we encounter this concept in regard to a man who has promised a sum of money to the one to whom his daughter is mekudeshet (betrothed but not yet married and requires a divorce to be free to marry another). He fails to keep his promise and is described as sticking out his foot to his prospective son-in-law as a declaration of his inability or unwillingness to honor his pledge.

Rashi offers two different explanations of this unusual gesture. One is that is his way of saying that he totally disregards the request and offers nothing more than "the dirt on his shoe". Another explanation is that it is his way of saying "Go hang me by my foot from a tree because I have nothing to give you."

Whether the disappointed chatan has recourse is a matter of dispute. One opinion is that he can indefinitely refuse to consummate marriage with the daughter unless he receives what he was promised. The Sage Admon, however, rules that she can claim that she is not responsible for her father's promise and can therefore insist that he either marry her or divorce her and not leave her in a state of limbo "till her hair turns gray".

Whether the father is indeed bankrupt or is only unwilling to pay is discussed by Tosefot as well as why the young man does not sue him in court for payment.

The opinion of Admon is the one favored by the halachic authorities. (Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer 52:1)

What the Sages Say

"A place where Moshe and Aharon did not merit to enter who says that I will merit to do so." (Ketubot 112a)

Rabbi Zeira, explaining why he was in such a hurry to cross the river and enter Eretz Yisrael

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