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ON REEH - 5769

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**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**  
**The TorahWeb Foundation**  
**Sharing our Joy**

The mitzvah of rejoicing appears in Parshas Reah in several contexts: eating of korbanos, maaser sheni, and the celebration of Yom Tov must all be performed with joy. Whenever we are commanded to rejoice, we are reminded to include those less fortunate in our celebration. From the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18), it would appear that the requirement to share our joy with others is an integral part of our actual fulfillment of simcha. Giving to others at a time of our joy is not merely a fulfillment of tzedaka, but rather is necessary for our personal joy, to be complete. Why is the simcha necessary for korbanos, maaser sheni, and Yom Tov not fulfilled if others aren't included?

Throughout Parshas Reah whenever simcha is mentioned, the Torah emphasizes that the simcha takes place "lifnei Hashem - in the presence of Hashem." Korbanos and maaser sheni are eaten in Yerushalayim "lifnei Hashem" and the Shalosh Regalim are celebrated "lifnei Hashem" by visiting the Beis HaMikdash. Even Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur have a dimension of simcha which is associated with being in the presence of Hashem. The Rav explained that although Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur don't have the physical aspect of "lifnei Hashem" of visiting the Beis HaMikdash, the teshuva process which is associated with the Yomim Noraim is also a form of being in the presence of Hashem. It is the state of being in the presence of Hashem that is the ultimate source of joy. The Experience of being in Hashem's presence, both physically and spiritually, enables us to refocus on how Hashem acts. Contemplating His actions, we immediately are reminded of how Hashem performs acts of kindness to others. Chazal teach us that ultimately our obligation to perform chessed emanates from our obligation to emulate Hashem's ways. Just as He is a gomel chessed, so too we must become gomlei chessed. The more aware we become of Hashem's traits, the greater our obligation to emulate Him becomes. As we visit Hashem in Yerushalayim to partake of korbanos, maaser sheni, and to celebrate Yom Tov we become even more cognizant of Him and His actions. It is this realization that must propel us to greater heights in of performing acts of chessed. If this experience of "lifnei Hashem" is authentic, it must be accompanied by a greater commitment to share with others.

Standing "lifnei Hashem" creates a dual obligation. It is the source of the mitzva of simcha as well as the source of chessed. If one rejoices by eating korbanos, maaser sheni, and celebrating Yom Tov, but does not share joy with others, that is indicative that his joy does not emanate from being in Hashem's presence. A true experience of being "lifnei Hashem" will inevitably result in a heightened awareness of the needs of others. One who spreads his joy with others has truly experienced the source of joy; he has stood "lifnei Hashem" and learned the lessons of that awesome experience.

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subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein - Parshat Re'eh

**Weekly Parsha :: RE'EH :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

There is an old adage in English usage that "seeing is believing." The Talmud phrased this message as follows: "There is no comparison between hearing about something to actually having seen it." In this week's parsha Moshe tells the Jewish people that the choices in life are not necessarily always those of faith and belief as much as they are of reality and experience.

The truth of Torah and tradition is indicated in the clear history of the Jewish people and in the reality of its existence and survival. It is said that insanity is the pursuit of a goal by the same methods that have never succeeded before and yet pursuing the same methods over and over again. The problems of Jewish survival and growth are evident to all, here in Israel and wherever Jews live in the world. Clearly it should be evident to all that Jewish survival and growth is not accomplished by compromising Judaism to fit current political and social correctness, which are societal fads that always shift with time and place.

Simply scanning the debris of the wrecked ideas, ideologies and policies that dominated much of Jewish life over the past two centuries should convince the rational observer that Jews need more Judaism and not less and that the preservation of Jewish values and practices is the key to successful Jewish life and accomplishment.

Seeing the success of tradition and its values in the preservation of the Jewish people against all odds and challenges should make all of us believers. Unfortunately that is still not the case.

The choices that Moshe poses for Israel are very stark – life and death, blessings and curses, immortality and fleeting life. Moshe expects the Jewish people to choose wisely. He bases his hopes on the recollections of the past decades of Jewish life that he has led. Simply by remembering what they already know and have experienced should be sufficient to guide the Jewish people on the path of wisdom and practicality.

Our generation, having assessed and experienced all of the wrong turns in the road of Jewish history over the more recent past should surely know by now that loyalty to Torah, its scholars and teachers, is the key to our future success. Yet Moshe is aware that the power of freedom of choice and the strength of physical desires are never to be underestimated.

He knows in sadness that the Jewish people will not be realistic in its choices and that it will forget and ignore the lessons of its own history and collective experience. The pull of foreign cultures and overbearing physicality will influence them. Seeing will not be believing. And thus Moshe sets the stage for the bitter prophecies that will yet follow in this book of Dvarim.

The bitter realities of persecution and unreasoning bigotry will awaken Israel to its true state of being and to its continuing mission as being God's people. But by having proper sight and practical wisdom a great deal of national pain can certainly be avoided.

Shabat shalom.

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from Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>  
to Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>  
subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum -

**Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**  
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**PARSHAS REEH**

**See! I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)**

There is a fascinating statement made in the Midrash Tanchuma that begs elucidation. Moshe Rabbeinu said, "I, who chose good, look at how different I am from the rest of the world." Sforno reiterates this statement, adding that because I chose "good," I, therefore, distinguish myself from the rest of the world. It is almost as if Moshe is patting himself on the back saying that all of this is his choice; therefore, he is different. It seems inconsistent with Moshe's hallmark as the most humble person who ever lived. Such self-praise is hardly what one would expect from a humble person.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that Moshe spoke these words in order to impress upon people that the reason he was different-in that he had achieved leadership over the Jewish People and an unparalleled relationship with Hashem-- had nothing to do with his birth. In other words, he was not some kind of unique neshamah, soul, unlike any other, that was sent down from Heaven at this critical juncture in the development of the nascent Jewish nation. He was an ordinary human being, like everyone else - who had made a choice. He had chosen tov, good. The profound wisdom which Moshe possessed was the consequence of his choice. Moshe is not the only one who is able to achieve this lofty spiritual plateau. Anyone who chooses good and devotes himself with toil and mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, can make it. Indeed, Moshe studied the Torah, forgot it, studied again, forgot it - until Hashem granted it to him as a Heavenly gift. Why? Because he toiled to receive it. He earned it. It was his choice - not his birthright!

Moshe Rabbeinu was not born into Klal Yisrael's hierarchy. He worked for it. It did not come easily to him. It was his choice, and he refused to give up. When Hashem took note of Moshe's extreme devotion, He gave him the Torah. The Torah is Divinely authored. As such, it is not mastered through acuity, but through toil. When Hashem notices our total desire, we receive it as a gift.

The Baal Turim comments: Mimeni tiru, v'chein taasu, "From me you shall see, and so shall you do." This means that Moshe was instructing the people to view him as a model to emulate. Rav Zaitchik explains that Moshe acted out of character due to a sense of love and compassion for the nation. This was not the way a humble man acts, but, since it was the only way to teach the people a derech ha'chaim, way of life, then it had to be. Rav Zaitchik adds that when the Alter of Slobadka, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl, was lauded for his brilliance and uncanny insight, he would retort that it was all a lie. His wisdom was the result of toiling in the service of the Almighty and self-sacrifice in reaching out to others. His natural talents were not that exemplary. His hard work earned him these accolades.

**See! I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing: that you listen to the commandments of Hashem...And the curse: if you do not listen to the mitzvos of Hashem. (11:26, 27, 28)**

Sforno's comment on this pasuk defines our life's objective, our raison d'être, "Look and perceive that your affairs as a nation will never be of an intermediate/average nature, as is the case with other nations, because, indeed, in your case, I have set before you either blessing or curse: two extremes (no middle road). Blessing implies good fortune beyond that which is sufficient, whereas curse represents diminishment, such that achievement even of requirements is out of reach. Both of these are before you, in accordance with your choosing."

Klal Yisrael is a nation of extremes. Whereas the fate of other nations is not marked by total prosperity or complete devastation, Klal Yisrael's is. There will be no middle course for us. We will either be blessed or cursed. These

are our only options. The choice is lifneichem, before you, whether we choose to listen or not. Torah brooks no compromise. Hashem demands total commitment and offers two extremes: blessing and curse. Why should this be the lot of the Jewish People? Why should our fate not mirror that of other nations, whose existence is more stable?

This is not a new question. Indeed, as the commentators note, the first one to raise the question was Eisav. Hinei anochi holeich lamus, lamah zeh li bechorah. "Behold, I am going to die; so what is the birthright worth to me?" (Bereishis 25:32) Rashi explains that Eisav was intimating, "Why should I want to accept a responsibility that incurs death if I do not carry it our properly?" As Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, asserts, we are deriving a fundamental principle from here: Corresponding to the greatness of the spiritual level is the detriment of its loss. The Kohen is obligated in a greater level of Divine service than a Yisrael. Thus, he is subject to harsher punishment for failure to fulfill his mission.

Is it worth it? Such a question bespeaks an obliviousness to the beauty and richness of a pulsating Torah life. It demonstrates a paucity of Torah experience, creating a vacuum in which one is content with living a life that merely avoids retribution. Clearly, there is much to write concerning this question but in order to do justice to the topic, we would need much more space. Rav Yeruchem reiterates the question: Is it, indeed, desirable for man to strive to reach lofty heights, if he thereby takes the risk of plummeting to the deepest depths? He quotes the Ramchal in his Mesillas Yesharim who states: There are some fools who seek only to lighten their burden. They say, "Why tire ourselves with so much saintliness? Is it not enough for us that we will at least not be counted among those who are wicked and judged in Gehinnom?"

These people are fools, simply because they are willing to settle for just not being numbered among the wicked. The beauty of Judaism is its rich experience and the opportunity to be part of a heritage that reaches back to the Avos v'Imahos, Patriarchs and Matriarchs. They settle for mediocrity, willingness to be counted among those who are "average," rather than reaching for the apex. This is why they are fools.

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, posits that the real motivation of these "fools" who shy away from a life of growth is an underlying egocentricity. They are following in the footsteps of Eisav, who exemplified foolishness with his repudiation of the birthright. His rejection of spirituality was justified in his mind by the fear of negative consequences that might ensue from taking "added" obligations. Why bother? Who needs the headache? Is there greater egocentricity than such a self-serving attitude? In truth, however, his rejection of spirituality was rooted in his inexorable attachment to the world of materialism and everything it had to offer someone like him.

Rav Yeruchem sums up his thesis with a bit of advice to the individual who strives for a life of spiritual blessing, but fears the pitfalls of failure and the retribution that comes with it: "When a person sees a horse, or any other animal, does he actually envy this animal's freedom? Beasts do not shoulder the burden of earning a livelihood; their sustenance is available wherever they go. Animals have no worries, living a life of constant gratification and recreation. However, no fool or simpleton would seriously desire to be a horse! With all the difficulties and burdens that it involves, man knows that the greatest satisfaction and pleasure is to be - a man!"

Those few sentences sum up for us why a Jew should distance himself from mediocrity in the extreme. We want to be better - we are better- so why should we not reach for the place we belong? We have only to look around us at contemporary society and ask ourselves: Is this what we really want? True, there is so much freedom, but the horse also has freedom. Does that mean we want to be a horse? Let us fill the roles in life that Hashem has designed for us. He knows that we can do it. Why not agree?

**You are children to Hashem, your G-d - You shall not slash yourselves nor make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d. (14:1, 2)**

We have a unique relationship with the Almighty that does not allow us to act like pagans by participating in their rituals. We are a holy people and are,

thus, mandated to act appropriately. Reading the above pasuk, the message seems clear and concise. When someone dies, his relatives are not to go overboard by mutilating themselves in response to their loss. This is not the way a holy people conducts themselves. Chazal see another, completely different, halachah derived from here. Lo sigodedu, "Do not slash yourselves;" lo saasu agudos, "Do not form factions."

The word sigodedu, in its simple translation, means do not slash yourself. The word is similar to the word agudah, which means group or faction. Hence, Chazal derive the prohibition against forming different factions. Practically, this disallows two batei din, courts of law, from rendering judgments in one town - one which ruled in accordance with Bais Hillel and the other which rules in accordance with Bais Shammai.

While the new halachah is practical, it seems totally out of place in connection with the simple translation of the pasuk. What does self-mutilation as a reaction to a death have to do with the factionalization of the Torah's legal system? Chazal do not simply attach a law to a pasuk. These two halachos must be linked on some level.

The Shem MiShmuel is bothered by this question, and, in an attempt to shed light on the problem, he cites the Ramban who lends insight to the underlying reason for the prohibition against mutilation. The Torah says, Ki Am Kadosh atah, "For you are a holy people." The Ramban explains "holy people" as being "the promise of the eternity of the soul before Hashem." The pasuk implies that, since we are a holy people and Hashem's treasure and "Hashem does not take away a soul, but makes a calculation so that none of us are banished" (Shmuel II 14:14), it is, therefore, inappropriate to mutilate oneself over the deceased, even if he dies young. The Zohar HaKadosh makes a similar statement in explaining the pasuk: "For he is not lost after his death; he is found in good, exalted and dear worlds."

We now understand the rationale for prohibiting excessive mourning. It indicates a problem with one's perspective on life. Jewish thought fundamentally believes that life on this world is the precursor for life in a higher realm. The soul never dies. It is eternal, and it returns to its home in the world of the spirit. Self-mutilation is grief to its extreme, revealing an attitude that is antithetical to Torah perspective. Such a person suggests that the deceased is dead and gone forever. There is no trace left of the human being who stood before us. If this were to be true, then extreme mourning would be in place, even though I would have commenced when the person was still alive! After all, what is life if there is nothing more to look forward to than a hole in the ground!

Clearly, anyone who believes that the soul is lost after death has a problem and is severely mistaken. Let us, however, address the body. It is surely lost, gone, decomposed, and returning to dust in its grave. The bereaved mutilates his body, indicating his feeling of loss over his relative's body. What is wrong with that? It is "body" for "body."

The Shem MiShmuel suggests that such an action demonstrates an improper view of the function of the body. The soul has primacy in Judaism, with the body serving as a secondary retainer to it. The body is not an end in itself, but serves as the "home" for the soul during its earthly sojourn. Through the body the soul is able to achieve its end purpose, and, ultimately, return to its Heavenly abode. The soul, which is entirely spiritual, cannot exist in a physical world without uniting with the body. Therefore, while the body serves a vital function, it is only there for the soul. When someone dies, it signals the end of the body's function, for the soul is being called back to Heaven. The body is no longer needed. Its mission has been accomplished. Excessive or extreme mourning, such as slashing, indicates a misunderstanding of this principle. The bereaved grants the body a much greater role than it serves - almost as if the body has a purpose of its own.

Having said this, the Shem MiShmuel now turns to the other lesson derived from this pasuk: the prohibition against forming different factions within the halachic system. This is a grave error which stems from dispute and disunity, in which each person or group seeks to impose his perspective to the exclusion of the others. I am right - he is wrong! Listen to me - not to

him! This is where the mistake begins to take root. One who realizes the significance of the soul recognizes that, at some level, the souls of all of Klal Yisrael derive from the same spiritual infrastructure. We are all part of one neshamah, soul, connected to the Almighty. It is only the physical characteristics of our existence which differ from person to person. It is specifically these physical diversities, when focused upon inappropriately, which create disharmony and factionalization among people. It all depends upon what one emphasizes. When one focuses on the spiritual dimension, then he will gain an appreciation of the parallel nature between human beings, since we are all part of one large neshamah. This will, ultimately, lead us toward unity and common ground.

We see now that Chazal's derivation concerning factionalization of the halachic system has a great deal in common with the underlying rationale prohibiting self-mutilation for the deceased. Both prohibitions stem from the same basic flaw, the same misguided perception of Judaism. One who focuses on the physical aspect of life is subject to fall prey to a host of errors, among them, self-mutilation at the time of bereavement and the factionalization of the legal system. The life and purpose of the individual who realizes that the body is nothing more than a container, a temporary receptacle to house the neshamah, soul, which is a Jew's essence, is more complete.

#### **And you will be completely joyous. (16:15)**

Joy should be an integral part of everyone's life. Everyone has something to be happy about, even if he will not concede it. Alas, there are those who cannot find joy in their life or, at least, never admit that they have something to celebrate. The Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh teaches us that simchah is a segulah, merit, by which we can achieve parnasah, livelihood. Once, on Tu B'Shvat, the Baal Shem Tov was sitting together with a group of his closest disciples in the city of Meziboz. They were eating fruit and drinking wine in honor of the New Year for trees, which is commemorated on the fifteenth of Shevat. The Baal Shem Tov was addressing the incredible value of joy and its impact upon our lives.

The Ari Zal writes that the Heavenly Angel who is appointed to "oversee" people's parnasah is called Chasach. This is supported by the words: Poseiach es yadecha, "Open up Your Hand," (Tehillim 145:16), a reference to Hashem's Hand which sustains us. The last letter of each of these words spells, ches, saf, chof- chasach. In addition, the Baal Shem explains that the gmatria, numerical equivalent, of the word u'masbia, "and sustains," is 428, which is the same gematria as chasach. When the Torah writes in our parsha, V'hayisa ach sameach, "and you will be completely joyous," we see that the last letters of these words are also ches, saf, chof. This teaches us that joy brings about parnasah.

The reason is simple. A happy person is a satisfied person, always seeing good in front of him. All that he has is reason to be joyful. Such a person does not constantly complain about what Hashem has given him. He is happy with his lot. If this is what I have, apparently this is what Hashem wants me to have.

Through simchah one can reach the spiritual plateau through which he is mekabel, accepts, the Shechinah. The Baal Shem substantiates this from the juxtaposition of V'hayisa ach sameach to Shalosh p'amim yeira'eh kol zechurcha es pnei Hashem Elokecha, "Three times a year all your males should appear before Hashem, your G-d" (ibid 16:16). The Torah is teaching us that when one is b'simchah, filled with joy, he reveals his true feelings that he is happy with Hashem's world, with the way He guides it. He has no complaints, no issues; everything is fine, good, perfect. Someone who has such an attitude, which is clearly the result of simchah, merits to "see" Hashem.

Let's face it: Simchah is an ideal which is-- all the more often than not-- something to strive for, but not a constant in most people's lives. We have drives and ambitions which are not always achieved immediately, or are necessarily to our liking. Does that give us reason to be happy? How does one attain "simchah" while simultaneously being beset by the vicissitudes of

life? By their very nature these adversities create a vacuum in our lives - a vacuum which must be filled.

What really is simchah? The Hebrew language uses ten words to describe happiness - each one connoting a different form, a unique sense of joy. The Malbim explains that simchah is distinguished from the other terms in that simchah is a constant, steady sense of joy, as opposed to gil, for instance, which denotes a sudden burst of joy. The Gaon zl, m'Vilna, as well as the Malbim, explain further that simchah is an inner state of happiness, a sense of deep satisfaction, as opposed to an outward expression of joy. The Maharal feels that simchah describes the emotion one feels when he senses a feeling of completion, of wholeness, when he does not lack anything.

Sasson, on the other hand, is the joy one experiences when he gains something new, when he accomplishes something special, when he achieves some sort of renewal. Thus, sasson is fleeting, dissipating as soon as the novelty is gone, whereas simchah is a profound feeling that lasts. How does one feel whole? How does he reach a state of completeness?

How does he reconcile these feelings and assimilate them into his psyche in order to achieve true simchas ha'chaim? We know that it happens, because everyone has met someone who generates an aura of true joy, even though we know that they are beset with trial and adversity. So, how do they do it?

The source of happiness described as simchah lies in enhancing one's awareness of Hashem's Presence in his life. The more profound the consciousness, the deeper the familiarity, the greater his sense of completion and, hence, the achievement of a greater degree of simchah. The individual who feels himself struggling with adversity, beset by shortcomings and frustrated by constant challenges is one who does not sense a closeness with the Almighty. He has distanced himself from Hashem, viewing himself as a separate entity, detached from G-d. Thus, his feelings of inadequacy and desperation are valid, because he is alone swimming in a sea of despair, with no source of life support.

The person whose life is infused with faith in Hashem does not necessarily walk on air. He is acutely aware of the challenges that confront him, but he is secure in his trust in the Almighty. He recognizes that whatever travails and problems come his way have a purpose and are all part of a Divine Plan, designed to benefit him in some way. Such a person is sameach b'chelko, happy with his lot in life. It is not a case of passive resignation, complacency, or mindless acceptance of one's fate. It is the consequence of one's recognition and appreciation of G-d and His profound way of guiding the world.

There is one "hitch" in the lifelong attainment of simchah: one has to work at it. Let me explain. David HaMelech says in Sefer Tehillim 119:53: Zemiro hayu li chukecha, "Your statutes are songs to me." He was subsequently chastised for this comment. Why? One would think that he was offering consummate praise, comparing chukim, mitzvos whose reason defy human rationale, with song, which is a source of joy. Basically, David was saying that he is overjoyed, given the opportunity to carry out such mitzvos. Why was he censured for this statement?

In his commentary to Mesillas Yesharim, Horav Yechezkel Sarna, zl, distinguishes between two forms of "simchah." One is represented by the joy inherent in listening to music. The band begins to play, and the listener's mood begins to change. He listens to the music, and a sense of joy encompasses him. Regrettably, this sense of happiness lasts only as long as the music plays. Joy generated by song is temporary. In contrast, one who has achieved a goal, built a house, authored a book, painted a painting, created something with his mind and his bare hands, feels a sense of joy that is enduring. He has invested his time, his effort, his wherewithal and, upon completion of the project, is filled with joy. It lasts, because he made the foundation. He worked for it.

By comparing the joys inherent in Torah to music, he is reducing them to something fleeting with no "shelf life." As soon as the song is over, when the band stops playing the music, the joy ceases. Torah study is more than hearing a good 'vort,' Torah thought. It is toiling to understand its profundities, laboring in the field of Torah, engaging oneself with other

scholars, constantly refining one's understanding of the subject, deepening one's cognition and appreciation of Torah. It is not music; it is labor, but it is sweet toil. V'haarev na, sweeten the words of Torah in our mouths. It is achievement. It is a joy that is enduring.

I think this idea may explain the difference between simchas chassan v'kallah, the joy that permeates the relationship of a chassan and kallah, and the profound joy that is infused in simchas beim ish l'ishto, the joy of a marriage that grows with each day as the relationship deepens and endures. When one works at something, he has a sense of achievement as he is completing his goal. As in all relationships, one must work at it, learning how to give and feeling a sense of joy in giving. This is simchas ha'chaim, as we bring ourselves closer to the Almighty, by learning how to give to Him, by accepting what He gives us.

Va'ani Tefillah

Boneh Yerushalayim Hashem. The Builder of Yerushalayim is Hashem. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, interprets for us David HaMelech's praise of Hashem in a practical manner. The only One who should be praised is Hashem. Let us for moment put ourselves in David HaMelech's shoes, as he looks out from the window of his palace in Yerushalayim and sees a city replete with buildings large and small. He could easily have thought, "I did all of this. I conquered the pagans and built up a Jewish city." Not David. He said, "Hashem built Yerushalayim. He gave the city into our hands. He put into our hearts the plan to build it up, and He provided the artisans with the materials. He gave the skill to these workmen. He is the builder of the city." Furthermore, it does not say, "He built," in the past tense, but that He is the builder. David realized, as should we, that the continued existence of all buildings depends solely on His will. If He should cease willing, then Yerushalayim, as well as any other city, would likewise cease to exist. Thus, the permanence of the city depends on our hope and trust in Hashem as the Builder of Yerushalayim.

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**Haaretz.com,**

**Portion of the Week / Sensible consumership**

**By Rabbi Dr. Benjamin (Benny) Lau**

For 40 years the Israelites had a fixed diet in the wilderness: manna in the morning, quail in the evening. That all changes when they enter the Promised Land: "When the Lord thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after" (Deuteronomy 12:20).

God severely punished the parents of this generation for lusting after meat soon after the Exodus from Egypt: "And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Numbers 11:4) The crisis from this craving was one of the gravest in the desert saga - Moses wanted to resign, God sent tons of quail, and then, a month later: "And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague" (Num. 11:33).

Now, before entry into the Promised Land, the craving for meat reawakens; however, this time, we are neither rebuked nor punished, and the Torah mentions the passion for meat matter-of-factly: "and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh ... thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after."

The Mishna's rabbis of the Yavneh generation - the first generation after the Second Temple's destruction - were divided over the meaning of the sweeping authorization God granted the Israelites concerning consumption of meat: "Rabbi Ishmael says: Here the Torah permits a craving for meat. Initially, the Israelites were prohibited from eating meat to satisfy that

craving; when they entered Canaan, this craving was permitted.' Rabbi Akiva says: 'Here the Torah prohibits the consumption of *bessir nekhirah* [meat of an animal that has not been ritually slaughtered but has been killed by sword, knife or spear]. Initially, the Israelites were permitted to eat such meat; when they entered Canaan, it was prohibited.'"

According to Rabbi Ishmael, the 40 years in the wilderness were miraculous, and entering the Promised Land restored the nation to a normative existence where meat consumption was allowed. According to Rabbi Akiva, desert life was not miraculous, whereas entering the Promised Land elevated the Israelites to a more spiritual plane, where meat could be eaten only if the animal was ritually slaughtered as a sacrifice - specifically, as a *shlamim*, a peace offering.

The debate between Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva revolves around the Torah's attitude toward eating meat. The former believes the prohibition against consuming meat teaches us that God wants to protect his creatures and thus forbids meat consumption when it is driven by bestial cravings. Like Adam and Eve in Paradise, the desert generation was permitted to eat meat only if the animal was offered as a sacrifice to God.

Rabbi Akiva interprets this differently, believing that desert life brought out our wilder side - thus, we were permitted to eat meat even if the animal, instead of being ritually slaughtered, was killed by other means. Only when the members of the desert generation wanted to eat meat for religious reasons, in the form of a peace offering, were they required to observe the rules of ritual slaughter.

In his essay "Fragments of Light," Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook writes that the Torah prefers we not eat meat, but does allow us to succumb to our baser instincts. If we cannot overcome our craving for meat, we can control our bestial inclinations by sublimating them through animal sacrifices - an option that was unavailable in the desert, he notes.

After the debate between Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, the midrash provides us with a third view: "Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria says: The Torah teaches us how to conduct ourselves, namely, that we should eat meat only when we crave it. Should we go to the marketplace to buy meat? But the Torah tells us, 'then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock' [Deut. 12:21]. Therefore, we can only eat meat if we possess cattle and sheep. Can we then offer all our sheep and cattle as sacrifices to eat meat? But the Torah tells us, 'of thy herd,' not all thy herd, and 'of thy flock,' not all thy flock."

Rabbi Elazar sees this verse as a guide to sensible consumerism. The issue of whether meat consumption was permitted *de jure* or *de facto* is irrelevant to the rabbi, who is concerned primarily with people who love meat so much that they are prepared to live beyond their means. When Rabbi Elazar asks whether we should go to the marketplace to buy meat, he is saying we should be satisfied with the meat we have in our own home.

Living beyond their means has led many families in modern-day Israel to financial collapse. Rabbi Elazar teaches us to avoid the temptation of "keeping up with the Joneses." When he asks whether we should offer all our sheep and cattle as sacrifices, he is telling us to limit our consumer urge. Rabbi Elazar did not live in the modern age where aggressive marketing offers powerful temptations, leading many to buy unnecessary things they cannot afford.

The midrash ends: "Thus Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria says: 'If you have only one maneh [ancient coin], you should place a pound of vegetables in your pot, and if you have 10 maneh, you can place a pound of fish in your pot. If you have 50 maneh, you can place a pound of meat in your pot, and if you have 100 maneh, you can place a pot of meat on the fire every day.'"

According to Rabbi Elazar, the poorer classes should fill their pot with vegetables, the middle classes with fish and sometimes meat, while the wealthier classes can enjoy meat daily. Rabbi Elazar is not arguing that we should all have the same purchasing power; he is teaching us to be happy with our lot.

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## Halachah Discussion

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

### Kiruv Rechokim: Halachic Guidelines

Of paramount importance to Orthodox Jewry today is kiruv rechokim, bringing our fellow Jews back to religious observance. Thank G-d, the concerted efforts of many devoted individuals and organizations have borne fruit, and thousands of Jews the world over have come back to their roots and become Torah observant.

We must bear in mind, however, that although kiruv rechokim is supremely important, it does not supersede Halachah. "The ends justify the means" is a philosophy utterly rejected by the Torah, and compromising halachic standards for the sake of being *mekarev* is forbidden. Let us review some of the potential trouble spots so that we do not transgress the Halachah while acting upon our good intentions.

#### The Shabbos Invitation

If a guest does not live within walking distance of our home, he should be invited for the entire Shabbos so that he does not drive home on our account. The guest should be told that according to Jewish law, it is prohibited for him to drive on Shabbos. Experienced kiruv workers maintain that when properly explained, the guest will often accede to the request.

In the event that the guest will come for Shabbos only if he can drive home, there are authorities who permit inviting him anyway, provided that there is a reasonable chance that the invitation will lead to kiruv.<sup>1</sup> The guest should be informed that sleeping quarters have been arranged for him and he may change his mind at any time and decide to sleep over.<sup>2</sup> Since not all authorities agree with this leniency<sup>3</sup> and not all cases are identical, the specific case should be presented to a *rav* for a final decision.

#### Serving food

Whenever possible, a guest at our table should be asked to wash his hands before eating bread<sup>4</sup> and to recite the proper blessing before and after food is eaten.<sup>5</sup> If the guest cannot read the Hebrew text, he may recite the blessing in any language that he understands.<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, the host may recite the blessings aloud while the guest listens and answers Amen.<sup>7</sup> If none of these suggestions are practical, it is permitted to serve him food, even though he will not wash his hands or recite a blessing, either before or after the meal.<sup>8</sup>

While teaching a non-observant Jew how to recite a blessing, it is permitted for the host to recite Hashem's name.<sup>9</sup>

The wine or grape juice should not be touched or poured by the guest.<sup>10</sup> If the wine or grape juice is *mevushal* (cooked), there are several authorities<sup>11</sup> who permit non-observant Jews to touch it, while others<sup>12</sup> do not.<sup>13</sup>

A non-observant Jew may be counted towards the minimum number of people required for *zimun*. Preferably, however, he should not be the one to lead the *zimun*.<sup>14</sup>

#### Issues of Modesty

A female guest, whether single or married, must meet the minimum standards of *tzenius* at least.<sup>15</sup> A woman who is scantily clad should not be invited into our homes under any circumstances. If, however, a female who is immodestly dressed finds her way into our home, then *Kiddush*, blessings, *divrei Torah*, or *zemiros* may not be recited while facing her. If one cannot avoid facing her, one may close his eyes or look away throughout the recitation of these *devarim sh'bekedushah*.<sup>16</sup>

A married woman's hair should be covered while she is sitting at our table. If it is not, there are *poskim* who are lenient and allow *devarim sh'bekedushah* to be recited in her presence.<sup>17</sup> One may rely on these *poskim* when no other alternative is practical.<sup>18</sup> See Discussion to *Parshas Naso* for an elaboration.

A female guest over eleven years old<sup>19</sup> should be asked explicitly not to

sing zemiros aloud, even if she is singing along with the rest of the family.<sup>20</sup> If this will result in alienating a potential ba'alas teshuvah, a rav should be consulted.<sup>21</sup>

Another sensitive issue that presents itself to just about anyone involved in kiruv is the problem of men and women shaking hands. Physical contact of this sort is a serious transgression<sup>22</sup> and should be studiously avoided.<sup>23</sup> Although kiruv professionals prepare themselves to deal with this problem, those of us who are not adept at handling such potentially embarrassing situations should not put ourselves in a position where we are liable to violate the Halachah.

Question: Is it permitted to celebrate a bas mitzvah in a shul?

Discussion: There are no early sources in Talmudic literature or poskim for the celebration of a bas mitzvah. Indeed, some poskim consider the practice to be a non-Jewish custom and prohibit it completely.<sup>24</sup> Other poskim, however, are more lenient; while not necessarily recommending the practice, they do not prohibit it. In their view it is considered like any other birthday party and, therefore, not a seudas mitzvah.<sup>25</sup> There are yet other poskim who consider a bas mitzvah as a seudas mitzvah and encourage it, if the purpose is to strengthen the girl's commitment to Torah and mitzvos.<sup>26</sup> All poskim, however, agree that a special "bas mitzvah party" should not be celebrated in a shul.

What is the difference between a bar mitzvah and a bas mitzvah? Why is a bar mitzvah celebration considered a seudas mitzvah while a bas mitzvah is not?

Rav M. Feinstein<sup>27</sup> explains the distinction in the following manner: When a boy becomes bar mitzvah, there is a recognizable change between his status before the bar mitzvah and after. He is now a full-fledged member of the congregation and can be counted in a minyan and a mezuman. This marked change requires a celebration and a seudas mitzvah. A girl, however, undergoes no apparent change. She has the same public status as before her bas mitzvah. Her transition affects only her private, personal mitzvah observance and, therefore, no public celebration is warranted or required.

Footnotes

Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:358. Several arguments lend support to this position: 1) The guest is desecrating the Shabbos regardless of my invitation; 2) Actually, we are minimizing his chillul Shabbos during the time period he will spend at our home; 3) He will be eating kosher food; 4) Several poskim hold that "aiding a sinner" does not apply to one who deliberately sins (see explanation of this logic in Igros Moshe, Y.D. 1:72 and E.H. 4:87-1 quoting the Dagul me-Revavah); 5) The purpose of the invitation is for kiruv and not to aid a sinner in committing a sin. 2 Emes l'Yaakov, C.M. 425, note 27 (oral ruling); Minchas Shlomo 2:4-10. 3 See Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:98-99; 4:71, who prohibits organizing a minyan for children on Shabbos when they will surely travel by car. There are several differences, however, between those cases and this one. 4 Rama, O.C. 163:2. 5 O.C. 169:2. 6 O.C. 185:1. 7 Mishnah Berurah 213:9. B'diavad, even if the guest failed to say Amen, his blessing is valid. 8 Rav S. Z. Auerbach, oral ruling, quoted in Vezos ha-Berachah, pg. 187 (see also Minchas Shlomo 1:35 where Rav Auerbach maintains that when denying a guest food will lead him to become antagonistic toward Torah and religious Jews, it is permitted to feed him. See also similar ruling quoted in the name of the Chazon Ish in Pe'er ha-Dor vol. 3, pg. 195). See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:13-9, Shevet ha-Levi 4:17 and Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:483 and 2:138 who find much room for leniency on this matter. 9 Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:56. 10 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 1:46; 2:132; 4:58-3; O.C. 5:37-8. 11 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:31; Minchas Yitzchak 7:61; Yabia Omer 8:15. 12 Minchas Shlomo 1:25; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (written responsum quoted in Yabia Omer, ibid); Shevet ha-Levi 2:51; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:401. 13 This issue is explained in The Weekly Halachah Discussion to Parashas Ki Sisa. 14 Rav S.Z. Auerbach and Rav C.P. Scheinberg (q