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To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>

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Weekly Blog :: **Rabbi Berel Wein [ZT"l]**

A Stiff-Necked People

5774

The Jewish nation is described in the Torah as being a stiff-necked people. In the context of that particular Torah discussion this description of the people of Israel is not necessarily a complimentary one. It refers to the stubbornness of the generation of the desert of Sinai and their rebellious nature in constantly refusing to abide by God's will and to accept Moshe's authority and rule.

Neither plagues nor wars, natural disasters such as serpents and poisonous snakes and supernatural punishments, seem to break their stubborn nature. That generation of the desert of Sinai, those who left Egypt, stood at the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai, survived on manna from heaven and water from the rock, still never lost their attachment to the culture and slavery of Egypt.

At every turn in the desert we read that they complained and said: "Let us turn our heads round and travel back to Egypt." Part of the nature of stubbornness is the inability to admit past error and to recalculate decisions, attitudes and policies. In the case of the generation of the desert of Sinai, this trait of stubbornness led to tragic consequences.

This generation, which possessed such greatness – the rabbis characterized that generation of the desert of Sinai as being a generation of great knowledge and superior potential wisdom – somehow doomed itself to destruction because of its stiff-necked stubbornness and preconceived negative attitudes. Because of this history of Jewish stubbornness, the phrase "a stiff-necked people" has entered the Jewish lexicon as a very negative trait.

Yet, in the long view of Jewish history over the millennia of its troubles and travails, exiles and persecutions, it is clear that it is this very nature of Jewish stubbornness that has preserved us until this day. Only a stiff-necked people could have survived and retained its identity, its faith, its culture and its vision of eventual destiny over so many years and obstacles.

We are alive simply because of the fact that we are a very stubborn people. Only a stubborn people would have survived the destruction of its Temple and exile from its land and still somehow returned to build it anew after so many years of absence and distance.

A stiff-necked people refuses to succumb to passing fads and imagined political correctness. A stiff-necked people realizes that a small minority can hold correct views and beliefs while more often than not overwhelming majorities are wrong in their policies and faiths.

The great rebbe of Kotzk phrased it correctly and pithily: "Truth can never be outvoted." So the trait of stubbornness and being stiff-necked has enabled the Jewish people to survive long and bitter centuries of exile and to restore itself to its land, independence and influence. It certainly has served us well through our travels in world history.

The Jewish people, especially here in Israel have exhibited tremendous fortitude, determination and resolute stubbornness over the past few weeks of our struggle with Hamas. Innumerable rockets have fallen on the Jewish population in the Land of Israel without breaking our spirit or crippling our justified response. It is not only the Iron Dome antimissile system that has protected us, though one should be awestruck at its efficiency and abilities, but it is the iron will and stubbornness of the Jewish people that has also protected us in this hour of need.

Other civilian populations have succumbed to such bombardments. In World War II, Poland and the Netherlands were broken by the Luftwaffe. However, Great Britain survived the Blitz and later the V1 and V2 rocket attacks even though it suffered more than sixty thousand civilian casualties therefrom. But this ability is currently doubtful, at least in the eyes of this observer of the current world.

Little such fortitude remains in Western society today. There are very few stubborn people left on the globe generally. But the trait of stubbornness has survived well and healthy within the people of Israel. It is undoubtedly part of our DNA makeup. Applied correctly and in proper measure and fitting circumstances, stubbornness and being stiff-necked can be a great virtue, a most positive character and national trait.

The world looks at us as being too stubborn and unreasonable. In a culture where moral equivalency prevails and there is no right or wrong, the world is disturbed by our stubbornness and by our refusing to somehow just let things be, even when our very existence is challenged by the actions of a murderous enemy.

If our enemies and our friends as well would but look at our history and our accomplishments they would realize the positive nature of our stubbornness and respect us for it instead of criticizing us. So we will undoubtedly continue to be a stiff-necked people.

Shabat shalom

Halachah Musings

Sheimos

by R. Gil Student

[In parshas Re'eh, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to destroy all idols and to destroy the names of those idols (Devarim 12:4). The next pasuk states "You shall not do so to Hashem, your G-d" (Devarim 12:4). This means that we are forbidden to destroy (erase) the name of G-d (Sifri, Devarim 61; Makkos 22a).]

What do you do with sacred books (sheimos) that become worn out or otherwise unneeded? Technology has given the question more weight. With so many newspapers, handouts and printouts, the question is more urgent now than ever. We recently discussed the custom in some place to respectfully burn them. This practice was forbidden by most authorities, with one outlier who justified it. Another possible way to deal with the plethora of sheimos is to recycle them. Even if the sheimos are treated respectfully, the deinking part of the recycling process erases the words through the introduction of chemicals. Does this constitute a forbidden erasure of sacred words?

I. What Becomes Sheimos?

Rav Shimon Ben Tzemach Duran (Rashbatz, 15th. cen., Algeria; Responsa Tashbetz 1:2) was asked about a school that did not have textbooks for children. Instead, each week the teacher would write verses on a blackboard, first erasing the previous week's verses. Is this allowed? Rashbatz begins by differentiating between the biblical and rabbinic prohibition against erasing sacred texts. The Torah says about idolatry, "and you shall destroy their name from out of that place" (Deut. 12:3) but warns "You shall not do so to the Lord your God" (ibid., 4). This applies to God's names, of which there are seven, including the Tetragrammaton, the name signifying lordship (adnus), Kel, etc. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah 6:2).

Rashbatz says that the biblical prohibition applies only to these seven names. Erasing any other part of a verse or a blessing or a religious text, including parts of the Oral Torah, is forbidden on a rabbinic level. Rashbatz points out that writing texts in anything other than a biblical scroll is technically forbidden but allowed because of "eis la'asos la-Shem, it is a time to do for the Lord" (Ps. 119:126), meaning we violate the law in order to sustain the Torah in general (Gittin 60b). If so, argues Rashbatz, erasing is the same as writing and we may do so in order to teach Torah to children if the erasure is only rabbinically forbidden. Rashbatz also says that texts and commentaries in any language have the same status as Hebrew.

Rashbatz's ruling is widely cited as authoritative. Elsewhere we have discussed the debate over whether God's name in any language other than Hebrew is considered among the seven names and therefore falls under the biblical prohibition, or not and it falls under the rabbinic prohibition. (Almost universally, authorities agree that printed books have the same status as written books. See Tzitz Eliezer 3:1:20.)

II. Pre-Publication Proofs

Already in the nineteenth century, the issue required evaluation due to technology. Before publication, authors need to review proofs of the books to correct for errors. Publishers were releasing so many new sacred books that they were overwhelmed with pre-publication proofs that qualified as sheimos. The question was asked whether these proofs could be disposed of in some way other than burial with a Torah scholar. Leading authorities debated the question.

Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor (19th cen., Russia; Ein Yitzchak 1:5) permitted the respectful disposal of these sheimos for a few reasons. First, he notes that generally speaking we are dealing with sheimos on a rabbinic level (pars. 1, 22), as explained above. Additionally, Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah 6:8) rules that if a heretic writes God's name, you may (and should) erase or destroy it because the heretic does not believe in the sanctity of God's name and therefore writes it like any other word. A heretic definitely has intent that the name is not sacred. What if the intent is neutral? This is a matter of debate. Therefore, Rav Spektor (pars. 16,38) suggests that proofs should be printed with explicit intent (said verbally) that they are not intended as sacred. Finally, he points out that the proofs are printed to be used temporarily, for checking, and not for learning Torah (pars. 13,34).

Therefore, Rav Spektor concludes, if burial is impossible, publishers may print pre-publication proofs with an explicit condition and have a child put the proof into a fire to dispose of them respectfully.

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv, 19th cen., Russia; Meishiv Davar 2:80) argues that it is permissible to destroy or erase sacred objects that are sanctified with the intent to destroy them. Pre-publication proofs are intended for proofreading and then destruction. Netziv compares this to sanctifying an animal as a sacrifice at a time when the Temple is destroyed and sacrifices cannot be brought. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 13a-b) allows destroying such an animal but only in a way that is not disrespectful. Similarly, we should be allowed to dispose of proofs that are printed for temporary use and then destruction.

Others disagreed with this leniency. For example, Rav Yosef Zechariah Stern (19th cen., Lithuania, Responsa Zecher Yehosef, Yoreh De'ah 191) dismisses the notion of disclaiming the sanctity of the text. If you are printing it as a sacred text, even for proofreading, it is a sacred text.

However, the reputation and prestige of Rav Spektor and Netziv gave their permissive rulings lasting authority. The difference between their reasons, however, bears relevance to our question today.

III. Indirect Erasure

Rav Shmuel Landau, son of the author of Noda Bi-Yehudah (vol. 2, Orach Chaim, no. 17) was asked about a room in a house that was used as a synagogue. Many years later, after having changed owners, can that room be used for personal uses including as a brewery for liquor. One part of the question addresses the prayers that remain written on the wall. The brewing process raises steam that would erase the writing. Rav Landau concludes that you are only allowed to indirectly erase the writing through gerama for the sake of a mitzvah, and this case does not qualify. Instead, he recommends placing a panel on top of the writing. In the course of his answer, he writes that there is no disrespectful treatment greater than erasure. I find this surprising. I would have thought that indirect erasure shows more respect than, for example, tossing words of Torah into the garbage.

The Gemara (Shabbos 120b) discusses a case of some who has God's name written on his arm. The Sages require him to cover the writing when immersing in water so the name is not erased. R. Yossi allows him to immerse normally because while we may not directly erase God's name, we may do indirectly (gerama). If gerama is allowed, this would open the door to many indirect forms of destroying sheimos. However, this ruling does not seem to be quoted by the codes. Rav Landau (ibid.) suggests that this passage is contradicted by a different Gemara (Megillah 26b) that a worn-out Torah scroll must be buried in an earthenware vessel. Why not bury it directly in the ground, since that would cause erasure/decomposition only indirectly? This passage must hold that erasure through gerama is forbidden. At the very least, gerama should only be allowed for a mitzvah, such as immersing for an obligation.

Rav Eliezer Eliyahu Grodnenski (19th cen., Lithuania), in a responsum published by his famous son-in-law and successor Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (Achiezer 2:48), distinguishes between a Torah scroll and other works including a single divine name written on an arm. We are obligated to save a Torah scroll from fire, even on Shabbos. Therefore, we certainly cannot destroy it indirectly. Other sacred texts and a divine name in isolation are different. We do not save them from fire on Shabbos and therefore may erase them through gerama. According to Rav Grodnenski, we may destroy pre-publication proofs through gerama, although he recommends asking a gentile to give it to another gentile to do so. This would seem to allow recycling sacred texts (other than biblical scrolls), as well.

Rav Shlomo HaCohen (19th cen., Lithuania, Cheshek Shlomo, Shabbos 120b) disputes Rav Grodnenski's assumption that a single divine name on an arm is comparable to a prayerbook or Talmud text. Those texts have only a rabbinic prohibition. The name of God has a biblical prohibition and therefore the same status as a Torah scroll. Therefore, Rav Landau's objection stands and we may not cause any Torah texts to be erased even through gerama, unless it is for the sake of a mitzvah.

IV. What Can Be Done to Torah Newspapers?

We saw above that Rav Spektor gave three reasons for leniency in disposing of pre-publication proofs. 1) They only constitute it sheimos on a rabbinic level. 2) You print them on condition not to sanctify them. 3) You print them for proofreading, not learning Torah. Netziv offers a different reason: 4) You print them with the intent to destroy them.

According to Rav Spektor's approach, you do not print proofs for learning Torah (#3). This does not apply to Torah newspapers and weekly readers. They are published for the specific intent of learning Torah. According to Netziv's approach, you print proofs temporarily, with the intent to destroy them (#4). We also publish weekly Torah material with the intent that they will be discarded shortly. According to Netziv, we should be allowed to discard or recycle Torah newspapers while according to Rav Spektor, we should not.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Iggeros Moshe, Orach Chaim, vol. 4, no. 39) follows Rav Spektor's approach and allows discarding sacred texts (without God's name) that are no longer usable. However, as long as they can be used, even

if you do not want them, you must bury them. It seems that according to Rav Feinstein, when it comes to Torah newspapers, you may store them until they degrade and cannot be handled any more. Only then, you can discard or recycle them.

Rav Nachum Rabinovitch (Si'ach Nachum, no. 74) and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Teshuvos Ve-Hanhagos, vol. 1, no. 553) compare Torah newspapers and weekly readers to pre-publication proofs. They seem to follow Netziv's approach, that publication with the intent to discard removes the prohibition. Additionally, they both argue that while the biblical prohibition is against erasing God's name, the rabbinic prohibition is only against treating sacred books disrespectfully. If you can erase or destroy them respectfully, then you do not violate the rabbinic prohibition either. Therefore, they suggest you discard them in a garbage or recycling bin where there is no garbage, wrapped respectfully in other paper or a bag. (Rav Sternbuch says that there is room to be strict and bury all sheimos.) Although recall that Rav Landau said that erasure is the ultimate form of disgrace. According to him, any form of recycling would violate the rabbinic prohibition against treating sacred texts disrespectfully. Gil Student Rabbi Gil Student is the Editor of TorahMusings.com, a leading website on Orthodox Jewish scholarly subjects, and Director of the Halacha Commission of the Rabbinical Alliance of America. He writes a popular column on issues of Jewish law and thought featured in newspapers and magazines, including the Orthodox Union's Jewish Action magazine, The Jewish Link, The Jewish Echo and The Jewish Vues. In the past, he has served as the President of the small Jewish publisher Yashar Books and as the Managing Editor of OU Press.

Parshas Re'eh Chofetz Chaim on the Torah

Chofetz Chaim Al Ha'Torah is a sefer of the Chofetz Chaim's divrei Torah on the Chumash, written by his trusted talmid, Rav Shmuel Greinemann zt"l.
כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ נָבִיא אִם חֶלֶם חֲלֹמִים וְנָתַן אֵלָיִךְ אֵת אֵם מִוֶּכֶת
If a prophet or a dreamer of a dream arises among you and presents you with an omen or a wonder... (Devarim 13:2)

Citing verses, Rashi explains that he gives you "an omen" in the heavens or "a wonder" on the earth. "Even so, do not listen to him. And you may ask, 'Why does Hakadosh Baruch Hu grant him the power to produce an omen?' The answer is that Hashem, your G-d is putting you to the test (13:4)." From here we see that in times when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to test the Jewish People, He gives great success to those who rebel against Him - to the point that they are able to perform "omens" and wonders." If this is so, He certainly gives them worldly, material types of success.

Now, from many verses it is clear that just before the Mashiach comes, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will subject our nation to very difficult tests- It is written, for example, I will purify them as one purifies silver, and I will refine them as one refines gold {Zechariah 13:9}. That is, He will test us to see whether we are truly devoted to Him and His Torah, as the verse concludes there. At that point in time, when it will be necessary to test people to show whether they truly love Him and the Torah with all their hearts and souls, He elevates those that have abandoned His way and gives them smashing successes in all that they do. This is a trial for those who serve Him, to see whether they remain faithful and continue to serve Him wholeheartedly despite all the successes of the blasphemers and those who hate Him. And if those who still serve Him pass this test, He will shower His love upon them and save them from the wicked. The verse, You shall destroy the evil from your midst, will be applied to the latter.

This is what is prophesied by Malachi, the last of the prophets: At that time, those who fear Hashem will speak, each man to his fellow (3:16). The reference is to the time when the evil-doers are enjoying tremendous success - as it is written in the preceding verse, Those who work wickedness are even built up, and those who test Him escape (3:15). That is when "those who fear Hashem and have regard for His Name" will gather and say to one another, "The time for the great test has arrived, and we should not resent or complain about the successes of the wicked, for Hashem is subjecting us to a trial, to

see whether we love Him with all our heart and soul. If we just withstand this trial, our redemption and salvation are near."

These prophetic words are particularly relevant to the present time, when we see the success of the wicked in destroying the world. Nevertheless, do not despair. We must not become downhearted because Hashem is testing us to see if we remain faithful to His Covenant, and if we love Him with all our heart.1

MAASAI L'MELECH

Rav Shmuel Greinemann zt"l

In Vilna, at a meeting of rabbanim and roshei yeshivah about strengthening Yiddishkeit and Torah institutions, one of the rabbanim began his drashah with the aforementioned verse, At that time, those who fear Hashem will speak, each man to his fellow (Malachi 3:16). He meant, "Now is the time to meet together and search for ways to strengthen the yeshivos and Yiddishkeit."

Later, at the same meeting, when the Chafetz Chaim began his drashah, he referred to the verse that the previous speaker had opened with. The Chafetz Chaim said that since the verse begins with the word az - "At that time (those who fear Hashem will speak)"/ it is obvious that the verse is a continuation of something. Accordingly, let us examine the previous verses.

Previously, in Hashem's Name, the prophet says to the nation: your words have been strong against Me... You said that it is not worthwhile to serve Elokim...and now you praise the evildoers, and those who work wickedness are even built up, and those who test Him escape. The Chafetz Chaim commented, "When the evildoers and the wicked are already built up and have tested Hashem and escaped Him, only then do those who fear Hashem meet and gather to talk to one another! But this is not a time for talk! When the transgressors are already entrenched, when they have already sent down strong roots and are solidly built on strong foundations, the time for action has come - decisive, powerful action to strengthen the institutions of Torah and all of Yiddishkeit!" And so he continued for a few hours. Fortunate are those who heard him!

Tongue in cheek, one of the great rabbanim of Vilna said that he would like to offer an explanation of the Chafetz Chaim's words, and a conclusion that the Chafetz Chaim in his humility refrained from articulating. Possibly, he wanted to continue as follows: az nidbaru (then shall speak...) That is, "We at these meetings speak, but who listens?" The verse answers, Hashem listened and heard. "Only Hashem pays attention to our drashos." And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Him. The Chafetz Chaim wanted to say, "Although you can be called yirei Hashem (those who fear Hashem), you remain [as the verse continues] choshvei Sh'mo (those who think about His Name)." That is, "You are like somebody who thinks to do something, but in the end does nothing, because that's how all of our meetings end..."

At that meeting the Chafetz Chaim spoke for more than four consecutive hours! Later, as the sun dipped nearer to the horizon and the shadows grew longer, one of the rabbanim expressed concern to those at the head table that it was necessary to daven Minchah. The Chafetz Chaim, seated nearby, heard and nearly started to complain that the meeting's proceedings were being needlessly interrupted. He said, "We are dealing with how to increase Heaven's honor through support for the yesh/vos, and they want to daven Minchah?!" In the end, though, those who wanted to interrupt the meeting and pray were victorious, and everyone present - nearly three hundred rabbanim - davened Minchah. After Minchah the gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer zt"/, who was the chairman of the gathering, explained the objection of the Chafetz Chaim zt"/: "It is an explicit halachah that one who is involved in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah. This is especially so if the first mitzvah is Torah study or the support of Torah study, which is equal [to all the other mitzvos]. But when does this apply? It applies when the first mitzvah is being fulfilled in the prescribed manner, as the Chafetz Chaim was doing, for all his thoughts and his entire being were immersed in the matter which we all came here to discuss. On the other hand, when some participants in the meeting were more concerned about Minchah, it was apparent that they had left room in their minds for other matters. Really,

therefore, they were obligated to daven Minchah - because only someone who is [fully] engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah." ... Chafetz Chaim on the Torah 2 Volume (recently republished) is available at <https://israelbookshoppublications.com/products/chafetz-chaim-on-the-torah-2-volume-slipcase-set>

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig - Parshas Reeh

That's What Friends Are For "This is what you shall not eat...the chasidah..." (14:12,18) The Ramban teaches that the birds which we are prohibited to eat exhibit negative character traits, and therefore, consumption of those birds would infuse these traits into the person's character.¹ In light of this, it is difficult to reconcile the Ramban's teaching with the Talmud's explanation of the name "chasidah", one of the prohibited birds, so called for the "chesed" - "kindness" which it displays towards its friends.² How could kindness be considered a negative trait? An answer is given in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe. Since the bird only performs acts of kindness for those whom it considers to be its friends, this is a negative trait. One should be sensitive to anyone in need, not exclusively to friends. However, this answer does not completely solve the problem. According to the Kotzker Rebbe's explanation, why does the Torah define the bird by the positive acts that it does, rather than by its negative trait, the chesed which it does not do? Perhaps the Talmud is teaching us that since the bird considers that which it does for its friends to be a chesed, this is a negative trait. One should view that which he does for his friends as an expression of his commitment to the relationship, not as a charitable act. 1. See Ramban Parshas Shemini 11:13, these are birds that exhibit cruelty. 2. Chullin 63a.

Morals and Meanings in Re'eh

Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

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Re'eh Will-Power

כִּי יִסְתִּידֶךָ אֱחִיד... לֹא־מֵרֶגֶץ וְנִעְבְּדָה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים... וְלֹא תַחֲסֹם עֵינֶיךָ עָלָיו וְלֹא תִחַמְלֵל וְלֹא תִכְסֶּה עָלָיו.

If your brother will entice you... saying, "Let us go and worship the gods of others"... your eye shall not take pity on him, you shall not be compassionate nor conceal him.[1]

The Torah's treatment of the one who entices others after idolatry is unusually severe. No compassion is shown to him and no claims advanced by the court on his behalf, as they would be in other cases. The reason for this exceptional treatment is provided in verse 11, "כִּי בִקַּשׁ לְהִדְרִיחַ מֵעַל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" – For he sought to make you stray from near Hashem, your God." That is to say, the extraordinarily harsh punishment is in response to his desire itself to cause people to stray from after Hashem, regardless of whether or not he succeeded in doing so.

Regarding this idea, R' Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, commented as follows: A well-known principle in the Torah is that "מִדָּה טוֹבָה מְרובה מִמֶּדֶת" – A positive measure is always more abundant than one of calamity." [2] If so, then we can learn from this parsha how great will be the reward for one who seeks and endeavors to bring people closer to Hashem, whether he succeeds in doing so or not. The very desire to connect people with their Father in heaven, and the effort expended toward that end, are in and of themselves of inestimable value, and sources of incalculable merit! [3] In addition, as we know, often the person may not be open or receptive to a Torah idea at the time, but it might resurface and reverberate at some later stage, perhaps even years later, when either life experience in general or a particular event may serve as a catalyst for the idea to impact them. A Torah idea is not always received as a ray of light that is beamed back towards us instantaneously. Sometimes it is a seed that is planted, and all we see before our eyes is it being swallowed up and disappearing into the ground. We are not always there to see when the rains come and allow it to sprout, or when the sun shines and enables it to develop.

May our portion always be among those who bring merit to the community, each of us with the unique set of talents and circumstances with which he has been blessed.

[1] Devarim 13:7-9. [2] See Sotah 11a. [3] R' Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm.

The Unique Characteristics of Kedushat Yerushalayim

Nov 3, 2017

Halakhic Positions of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik

by R. Aharon Ziegler

Rav Soloveitchik expressed the idea that Yerushalayim is endowed with a unique Kedusha (holiness) that is called kedushat shechina-the holiness of G-d. Whereas the holiness of most places emerges from human energy, the holiness of Yerushalayim does not emerge from us, it comes from an external force- from G-d Himself.

The Rambam concludes (Hilchot Beit HaBechira 6:16) that just as HaShem is above any boundary of time, so too the holiness that emerges from HaShem is equally eternal. It follows, therefore, that Yerushalayim's holiness is endless and infinite. It is a Kedusha that lasts forever.

The Rav pointed out that when we first entered Eretz Yisrael in the days of Yehoshua, Yerushalayim was conquered last. The movement of conquering the land was from the periphery to the center. Hundreds of years passed between the conquest of Yericho by Yehoshua, and the building of the Beit HaMikdash by Shlomo HaMelech. Since the Land of Israel was conquered prior to Yerushalayim, Israel remained holy only as long as we maintained control of the land. Once the land was conquered by the Babylonians, the holiness departed.

However, when we re-entered the land in the days of Ezra, Yerushalayim was settled first. It follows, therefore, that whatever lands were liberated afterwards, were imbued with the spirit of Yerushalayim. Just as the holiness of Yerushalayim is eternal, so too is the holiness of the whole part of Israel. That is why the Rambam believes that even after the Roman conquest of Israel; the land retained its holiness.

The Har HaBayit and Yerushalayim are the Neshama (soul) of the Jewish people and the Neshama of the Jewish land. It is above and beyond any boundary of time, and reminds us of our proud past and of our hope and faith in a promising future.

Parshat Re'eh by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -

www.seasonsofthemoon.com **Parsha Overview** Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael, they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there, but not to a private altar.

Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of foods that may be eaten only in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying the ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it. If a so-called prophet tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot.

Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted, and then Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee Year. This Torah portion concludes with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

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Rabbi Berel Wein: Influences & Reflections

by Rabbi Berel Wein

April 1, 2025

One of my most vivid childhood memories is of my father taking me with him to Chicago's Midway Airport to greet Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, the chief rabbi of Palestine after the Second World War. Almost all the distinguished Orthodox rabbis in Chicago came to the airport that day to welcome him. I remember him alighting from the plane and walking down the stairs in his shiny top hat, holding his cane in one hand and a Tanach (Bible) in the other. With his silver beard and aristocratic demeanor, he was a majestic presence.

We all accompanied Rabbi Herzog to the yeshiva, where he delivered a 45-minute Talmudic lecture in Yiddish. I still remember his topic, and though I was not yet bar mitzvah, I pretty much followed his discourse. After that, he addressed us in English. Having been a rabbi in Dublin, he spoke with a slight Irish brogue, which I found somewhat incongruous with his Eastern European rabbinical appearance. Rabbi Herzog told us he had been to the Vatican and had asked Pope Pius XII to return the thousands of Jewish children entrusted to Catholic institutions in Europe by parents hoping to save them from annihilation at the hands of the Germans. The pope had flatly refused, claiming that since all the children had been baptized upon entering those institutions, they could not now be given over to those who would raise them in a different faith. Overcome with emotion, the rabbi put his head down on the lectern and wept bitterly. We were all in shock, as the enormity of the Jewish tragedy of World War II began sinking in.

Then Rabbi Herzog defiantly raised his head and looked at the young men gathered before him. "I cannot save those thousands of Jewish children," he declared, "but I ask of you – how are you going to help rebuild the Jewish People?" Afterward, when we filed by him to shake his hand and receive his blessing, he repeated to each and every one of us: "Did you understand what I said to you? Don't forget it."

All my life, Rabbi Herzog's words have echoed in my ears and soul. Numerous times in my rabbinic career, I've been discouraged and downhearted. But then I remembered his words. They have continually inspired and challenged me, shaping many of my decisions and actions.

Herman Wouk

Aside from the two very influential speeches I heard from Rabbi Herzog and Rabbi Kahaneman (the Ponivezher Rav), two addresses delivered at banquets in the 1950s impacted my life's ambitions and thoughts.

The first was by Herman Wouk, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, playwright, and screenwriter. He was an observant Jew who had made good in the outside world – a rarity in his time. Back then, the Jewish world believed that no Orthodox Jew could succeed in American life without sacrificing Torah observance and beliefs. The prevalent assumption was that one had to blend in to the general American lifestyle and mores in order to achieve fame and fortune. Considered an anachronism, Orthodox Jews were encouraged to maintain a low profile and never rock the boat. In such an anti-Orthodox climate, Herman Wouk delivered a 45-minute oratorical gem in defense of Torah study and observance to a mainly non-observant audience. He warned that his listeners would have no Jewish descendants if they themselves did not adopt a more Jewish lifestyle. The audience was stunned, for the Orthodox rabbis of the day dared not be so blunt. For the first time in a long time, I felt that Orthodoxy had a chance to succeed in a big way in America.

I always have been grateful to Wouk for that speech and for his great book *This Is My God*. I found this work very useful in my rabbinic career; I must have given away dozens of copies to Jews who knew nothing of their faith but felt some inner pull to at least find out what they were abandoning.

The second speech, delivered at a banquet for Beis Medrash L'Torah in the early 1950s, was by Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz of Elizabeth, New Jersey. Most European rabbis used speaking engagements to bemoan the state of American Jewry, especially in comparison to the glory days of Eastern European Jewish life. Not Rabbi Teitz. He spoke of a coming revolution in American Jewish life; of a growing and vital Orthodoxy; of the triumph of the day school and yeshiva movements. His optimism made him a heroic figure in my eyes, and he remained such over many decades. I had much to do with him later in life, and he was of great help to me in numerous rabbinic matters. Every rabbi needs a hero to help guide him, and Rabbi Teitz played that role for me in many areas of Jewish public life.

Supporting the Donor

Rabbi Kahaneman, the Ponivezher Rav, enlisted me to be his driver a few mornings a week as he raised funds for his yeshiva. Just being in his company was an honor and a joy. I learned a great deal from him about people, life, fundraising, and – above all – Torah knowledge and values. He loved all Jews (no easy task), and they loved him back. He taught me that one must accept personal insults and slights for the sake of

Torah. I witnessed many "miraculous" feats of fundraising. He could get money from a stone.

During those years, I knew a wonderful man in my congregation. He was a widower without children, though he had nephews and nieces. He was quite wealthy, but at only 55 had suffered two heart attacks and survived cancer. His doctors advised him to live out his few remaining years in the Florida sunshine rather than the frost and snow of northern New Jersey. So he retired to Miami Beach, where he became a leader in our community. Mindful of his physicians' predictions, he dutifully purchased an annuity plan that would provide him with a generous income until age ninety. He fully expected to die before then.

But the Lord thought otherwise, and this fellow reached his 90th birthday fully well, still productive, and active. But now he had no income, and he rapidly used up his savings. No bank would advance him a mortgage due to his age. So I organized deliveries of food and other necessities to him.

The man had been a staunch supporter of the Ponivezh Yeshiva, giving Rav Kahaneman a sizable donation every year. One day, the Rav instructed me to take him to this man's house. I told him that his former supporter had no money now and that our visit under these circumstances would embarrass him. Nevertheless, the Rav insisted.

We arrived and sat down in the man's living room. The Rav announced in his mellifluous voice, and with that wonderful smile on his face, "Until now, you have generously helped the yeshiva in its times of need. Now the yeshiva is going to repay you in kind. Every month the yeshiva will send you the amount of your monthly annuity check, and I want you to continue living as you always have." Offsetting the man's protests, he added, "After 120 years, you and I will straighten out this matter between us."

As we left the bewildered old gentleman, the Rav told me, "A yeshiva is also obligated to perform acts of kindness and mercy to others." And that is exactly what he did. For the next four years, until the man passed away, the yeshiva sent him a monthly check. Upon his death, he left his house in Miami Beach to the yeshiva.

It's All Your Fault

During my years as rabbinic administrator, I flew a lot. Interesting things always seem to occur on my travels, providing me with lots of airplane stories. In early 1974, when the Arab oil embargo of America was in full force, I was seated on a plane next to a very well-dressed businesswoman. In mid-flight, without warning, she turned to me and said, "You know, all this trouble we're in is your fault." America was suffering from a major gasoline shortage, with long lines at every gas station, bringing much latent anti-Semitism to the fore. Yet I was taken aback by the nature and tone of her words.

Somehow, I very calmly answered her, "No, madam. It may be because of me, but it is definitely not my fault." We said nothing more for the rest of the flight.

Remember: Much may happen in human society and history for which the Jewish People may be the catalyst, but in no way does that make us at fault for what occurs.

This crucial subtlety underpins all intelligent appraisals of Jewish history.

Teach Them Diligently: The Personal Story of a Community Rabbi by Rabbi Berel Wein is published by Maggid Books, a division of Koren Publishers Jerusalem. It is available online and at local Jewish bookstores.

<https://mishpacha.com/voice-of-history/>

Voice of History

By Gedalia Guttentag | August 19, 2025

Rabbi Berel Wein: An unquenchable love for the greatest saga of all — the survival of his people

For Rabbi Berel Wein, the historical narrative wasn't just about the past, but about the present and future — about life itself, woven with the dramatic chronicle of unshakable Jewish faith. Yet his scholarly and rabbinic achievements rested on the foundation of his early life, growing up in Chicago among the previous generation's gedolim — and on an unquenchable love for the greatest saga of all: the survival of his people

If you walked into Rabbi Berel Wein's Rechavia apartment in recent years, chances are you caught a glimpse of something rare: the sight of real thinking.

Not the mere brain activity that most of us engage in, but sustained, active thought. Head in hand, withdrawn from the surroundings, pondering something deep — that was my first impression of Rabbi Wein a few years ago, when I asked for some time to discuss a Jewish history project.

When I entered, I beheld a legend. The larger-than-life rabbi, rosh yeshiva and raconteur who'd placed volumes on all of our shelves, and Jewish history on the Orthodox world's curriculum. There he sat, his sight failing but his penetrating vision ranging through the Jewish ages.

What I discovered in that first conversation was that for Rabbi Wein, history wasn't about the past for its own sake. It was about the present and future — about life itself.

The way he made sense of the world was by unlocking the treasure-houses of what had already been. The conviction with which he lived — what drove him through a career of unusual variety and creativity — were those thousands of years of Jewish history. History undergirded his sense of netzach Yisrael, the call of the Torah ranging across time, the awareness of Jewish destiny.

Shaped by Lithuania Rabbi Wein, who passed away last Shabbos at 91, was born in 1934 into a house with a pedigree of greatness. His father, Rabbi Zev Wein, was a talmid of Rav Shimon Shkop in Grodno, and later of Rav Kook in Yerushalayim, who emigrated to Chicago and served in its rabbinate until the 1970s.

That lineage afforded Rabbi Wein junior a second-hand encounter with the masters of the prewar yeshivah world. Those impressions were reinforced by his rebbeim at Hebrew Theological College, later known as Skokie Yeshiva, founded by his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Rubenstein.

Rabbi Rubenstein — whom Rabbi Wein described as his “hero” — was no ordinary personality either. He had been a chavrusa in Volozhin Yeshiva of the famous Meitscheter Illui, Rabbi Shlomo Polachek. It was he who set his grandson on the path to lifelong Torah scholarship.

He urged young Berel’s parents to remove their son from public school when he was 11 and place him in a class of 16-year-olds in the yeshivah. Until then, Mrs. Wein used to review her son’s school lessons with him every day, telling him what he should ignore.

The milieu that Rabbi Wein was raised in was that of Litvaks transplanted to American soil — an environment that was inhospitable to Orthodoxy until the great rise of the postwar yeshivah world. It manifested the complexity of Jews who came from a storied past, yet struggled with observance in the present.

“I can still summon up the atmosphere in my father’s shul on Rosh Hashanah,” Rabbi Wein said in an interview for this magazine. “During the Shemoneh Esreh, one could feel the intensity and that we were truly hanging between life and death, chayim u’maves. And many of those who davened in his shul felt compelled to work on Shabbos.”

The Midwest’s first yeshivah featured an all-star set of roshei yeshivah who were some of the finest minds of the Eastern European Torah world. One was Rav Chaim Kreiswirth, an illui who had been close to Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski in Vilna. Later a legendary chief rabbi in Antwerp, he became Rabbi Wein’s main rebbi. Other strong influences there were Rav Mordechai Rogow and renowned mechanech Rav Mendel Kaplan.

The affinity for old-world greatness nurtured under these teachers meant that Torah leaders as diverse as the Ponevezher Rav and the Satmar Rav saw Rabbi Wein as a figure of stature.

World of Books Beis Medrash L’Torah, as Skokie Yeshiva was officially called, possessed a magnificent library, with 30,000 volumes, which were housed in a separate building. Since Berel’s classmates were much older and taller than him, instead of playing basketball with them during lunch break, he wandered into the library building.

There he nurtured his natural love of books. The librarian, Mrs. Mishkin, whose husband was head of the Vaad Hachinuch of the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago, would hand the young boy books to read, most of them on Jewish history. The first was a biography of the Rosh. Over a lifetime of voracious reading, Rabbi Wein would devour countless volumes.

Blessed with a sharp mind and phenomenal recall, his research on any given topic was informed by the library that he’d ingested.

In 1955, Rabbi Wein married Yocheved (Jackie) née Levin, whose father Rav Eliezer was a product of Kelm and a leading member of the Detroit rabbinate.

An education spanning Skokie Yeshiva, Yeshiva University, and then law school, meant that when he left the legal world, he entered his first rabbinic position at Beth Israel in Miami Beach in 1964 with an unusually diverse skillset. He was a leader, educator, and writer all rolled into one.

Given his background and clear aptitude for rabbinics, why did he practice law at all? In an interview with Mishpacha, he explained that the realities of the time dictated his career choices.

“When I graduated college at 18, my father took me aside and spelled out the facts of life. We had little money. The number of shuls in Chicago was in rapid decline, and the chances of securing a pulpit were slim. A relative told my father that he would bring me into his small firm if I passed the bar.

I was accepted at the University of Chicago Law School, one of the country’s best, but I wanted to continue in the semichah shiur at HTC, and so I went to DePaul Law School at night.”

In the tussle between parnassah and purpose, the latter eventually won out — helped along by a dose of disenchantment with the law as a profession.

“In the practice of law, you tend to see people at their worst, and since most of my clients were Orthodox Jews, I found that extremely disheartening,” Rabbi Wein said.

“Rav Chaim Kreiswirth, who had been my rosh yeshivah, often told me on his frequent visits to Chicago that there were enough Jewish lawyers. And indeed, I

eventually started a tool-and-die business to enable me to get out of the practice of law.

“One day, as I was closing the business, I found my old friend from yeshivah Rabbi Aryeh Rottman waiting for me.

“I’m leaving my shul in Miami Beach, and Rabbi Kreiswirth says you should be my successor,” he told me.

“I replied that I wasn’t interested, but Rabbi Rottman was not someone who took no for an answer, especially when on a mission from his rosh yeshivah. Eventually, he prevailed on me to go for a trial, and I was offered the job after a very narrow congregational vote. Fortunately, by the time I left nine years later, I think I would have won a unanimous or near unanimous vote.”

Practice and Preaching Sometimes, lost in the hindsight of his writing career was the very practical and multifaceted nature of decades of previous work. From 1964 to 1972, Rabbi Wein served as Executive Vice President of OU Kashrus, a period in which the organization attained its global prominence thanks to Rabbi Wein’s work. The OU position came about through a connection formed in Miami Beach. Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg, the director of the OU Kashrus Division, appointed Rabbi Wein as a mashgiach at various nearby food producers. Over the course of two decades, Rabbi Rosenberg built the Kashrus Division from 40 mashgichim, certifying 184 products of 37 companies, into an organization with 750 mashgichim, 2,500 products, and 475 companies. The two rabbis struck up a close relationship, which paved the way for Rabbi Wein to enter the OU’s top ranks.

The next stop in 1972 was Suffern, New York, where Rabbi Wein became rav of Bais Torah Congregation in Rockland County.

Over the next 25 years, he had a transformative effect on the community. He founded Yeshiva Shaarei Torah, developed chessed institutions, and attracted young families to settle and build Jewish life.

During those years, congregants were exposed to the signature blend of Torah, history, and dry humor that later became famous worldwide.

That groundbreaking combination of erudition and style burst into cars and living rooms across the Jewish world in the 1980s. Rabbi Wein would retell the encounter in Yerushalayim in which he concluded that — as good as his chiddushim as a rosh yeshivah in Monsey were — others could do that job.

His own calling was to tell the story of Am Yisrael. That fateful encounter led to the Destiny series of tapes, books, and movies on Jewish history.

Within a few years, his coffee-table edition trilogy Herald of Destiny, Triumph of Survival, and Echoes of Glory adorned homes and shuls across the English-speaking world. The publishing process turned Rabbi Wein and Artscroll general editor Rabbi Nosson Scherman — who edited many of his books — into good friends.

“The relationship was far deeper than merely professional,” says Rabbi Scherman.

“Although Reb Berel was a genius and an excellent writer, he welcomed suggestions and editing. He valued accuracy over ego. It was not only an education, but a pleasure to work with him.”

The landmark 4-volume history series presented the story of the Jewish people across the centuries, leavened by his acute observations, constructive cynicism, and gentle humor.

“He was a master at combining Jewish and general history and showing how our people were affected by, and coped with, the powers and events that surrounded and often subjugated them.”

Along the way were flashes of his trademark wit, Rabbi Scherman remembers. “An interviewer asked him how he arrived at the title, Herald of History. He replied, “Harold is a Jewish name, isn’t it?”

Past Forward His feat was to transform history — to many, a dusty discipline — into the dramatic narrative of Jewish faith that it should be. The pre-eminent popular Jewish historian, he knew how to retain the grand sweep of a saga, while retaining the accuracy demanded of history as a discipline.

Always focused on the Jewish future, Rabbi Wein believed firmly that the post-Holocaust revival that had two great centers — Israel and America — would tilt ever more firmly in the favor of the Holy Land.

“Every exile ends, and that end is not usually a happy one,” he said. “I can well imagine an America in which the government tells religious Jews what they can and cannot teach in their schools, and in which religious liberty is gradually whittled away. By contrast, in Israel, I have witnessed over the last 30 years, that the society as a whole has become more and more Jewish. That can easily be missed if we focus too much on the day-to-day religious battles and ignore the long-term trends.

“But the one absolute principle of Jewish history is that Jewish communities only flourish when there is a strong core of Torah learning and mitzvah observance.”

Given those beliefs in the Providential rise of Eretz Yisrael as the focus of Jewish history — now rushing toward its conclusion — it’s no surprise that Rabbi Wein chose to put his money where his abundant words were.

That’s where he and his wife directed themselves in 1997, where Rabbi Wein — pulpit rabbi, historian, and visionary — attained the prestigious podium of the Beit Knesset Hanasi in Rechavia.

From that leafy Yerushalmi neighborhood, his prolific output continued to flow, the Torah of destiny emanating from Tzion continuing beyond his own petirah in the form of yet to be published writings.

So prolific was his output — both print and oral — that a standard tribute is largely unnecessary, since Rabbi Wein was himself his own biographer. What follows are tributes from family, students, and colleagues. They paint a picture of a unique rabbi — one who followed his inner calling to amplify the Bas Kol, the booming Heavenly Voice that resonates out of Jewish history.

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COVENANT & CONVERSATION

The Politics of Freedom

RE'EH

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

written by Rabbi Sacks in 2012

Having set out the broad principles of the covenant, Moses now turns to the details, which extend over many chapters and several parshiyot. The long review of the laws that will govern Israel in its land begin and end with Moses posing a momentous choice. Here is how he frames it in this week's parsha:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.

Deut. 11:26-28 And here is how he puts it at the end:

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.

Deut. 30:15, Deut. 30:19 Maimonides takes these two passages as proof of our belief in freewill (Hilchot Teshuvah 5:3), which indeed they are. But they are more than that. They are also a political statement. The connection between individual freedom (which Maimonides is talking about) and collective choice (which Moses is talking about) is this: If humans are free then they need a free society within which to exercise that freedom. The book of Devarim represents the first attempt in history to create a free society.

Moses' vision is deeply political but in a unique way. It is not politics as the pursuit of power or the defence of interests or the preservation of class and caste. It is not politics as an expression of national glory and renown. There is no desire in Moses' words for fame, honour, expansion, empire. There is not a word of nationalism in the conventional sense. Moses does not tell the people that they are great. He tells them that they have been rebellious, they have sinned, and that their failure of faith during the episode of the spies cost them forty extra years of delay before entering the land. Moses would not have won an election. He was not that kind of leader.

Instead he summons the people to humility and responsibility. We are the nation, he says in effect, that has been chosen by God for a great experiment. Can we create a society that is not Egypt, not empire, not divided into rulers and ruled? Can we stay faithful to the more-than-human hand that has guided our destinies since I first stood before Pharaoh and asked for our freedom? For if we truly believe in God — not God as a philosophical abstraction but God in whose handwriting our history has been written, God to whom we pledged allegiance at Mount Sinai, God who is our only sovereign — then we can do great things.

Not great in conventional terms, but great in moral terms. For if all power, all wealth, all might belong to God, then none of these things can rightfully set us apart one from another. We are all equally precious in His sight. We have been charged by Him to feed the poor and bring the orphan and widow, the landless Levite and non-Israelite stranger, into our midst, sharing our

celebrations and days of rest. We have been commanded to create a just society that honours human dignity and freedom.

Moses insists on three things. First, we are free. The choice is ours. Blessing or curse? Good or evil? Faithfulness or faithlessness? You decide, says Moses. Never has freedom been so starkly defined, not just for an individual but for a nation as a whole. We do not find it hard to understand that as individuals we are confronted by moral choices. Adam and Eve were. So was Cain. Choice is written into the human condition.

But to be told this as a nation — this is something new. There is no defence, says Moses, in protestations of powerlessness, in saying, We could not help it. We were outnumbered. We were defeated. It was the fault of our leaders or our enemies. No, says Moses, your fate is in your hands. The sovereignty of God does not take away human responsibility. To the contrary, it places it centre-stage. If you are faithful to God, says Moses, you will prevail over empires. If you are not, nothing else — not military strength nor political alliances — will help you.

If you betray your unique destiny, if you worship the gods of the surrounding nations, then you will become like them. You will suffer the fate of all small nations in an age of superpowers. Don't blame others or chance or ill-fortune for your defeat. The choice is yours; the responsibility is yours alone.

Second, we are collectively responsible. The phrase "All Israel are sureties for one another" is rabbinic but the idea is already present in the Torah. This too is radical. There is no "great man" theory of history in Judaism, nothing of what Carlyle called "heroes and hero-worship." The fate of Israel depends on the response of Israel, all Israel, from "the heads of your tribes, your elders and officers" to your "hewers of wood and drawers of water." This is the origin of the American phrase (which has no counterpart in the vocabulary of British politics), "We, the people." Unlike all other nations in the ancient world and most today, the people of the covenant did not believe that their destiny was determined by kings, emperors, a royal court or a governing elite. It is determined by each of us as moral agents, conjointly responsible for the common good. This is what Michael Walzer means when — in his recent book, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* — he calls biblical Israel an "almost democracy."

Third, it is a God-centred politics. There was no word for this in the ancient world either, so Josephus had to coin one. He called it "theocracy."

However, this word has been much abused and taken to mean what it does not, namely rule by clerics, priests. That is not what Israel was. Again an American phrase comes to mind. Israel was "one nation under God." If any single word does justice to the vision of Deuteronomy it is not theocracy but nomocracy, "the rule of laws, not men."

Biblical Israel is the first example in history of an attempt to create a free society. Not free in the modern sense of liberty of conscience. That concept was born in the seventeenth century in a Europe that had been scarred for a century by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Liberty of conscience is the attempt to solve the problem of how people with markedly different religious beliefs (all of them Christians, as it happened) can live peaceably with one another. That is not the problem to which biblical Israel is an answer.

Instead it was an answer to the question: how can freedom and responsibility be shared equally by all? How can limits be placed on the power of rulers to turn the mass of people into slaves — not necessarily literally slaves but as a labour force to be used to build monumental buildings or engage in empire-building wars? It was the great nineteenth century historian Lord Acton who rightly saw that freedom in this sense was born in biblical Israel:

The government of the Israelites was a Federation, held together by no political authority, but by the unity of race and faith, and founded, not on physical force, but on a voluntary covenant... The throne was erected on a compact, and the king was deprived of the right of legislation among the people that recognised no lawgiver but God... The inspired men who rose in unflinching succession to prophesy against the usurper and the tyrant, constantly proclaimed that the laws, which were divine, were paramount over sinful rulers... Thus the example of the Hebrew nation laid down the parallel lines on which all freedom has been won.[1]

It is a beautiful, powerful, challenging idea. If God is our only sovereign, then all human power is delegated, limited, subject to moral constraints. Jews were the first to believe that an entire nation could govern itself in freedom and equal dignity. This has nothing to do with political structures (monarchy, oligarchy, democracy – Jews have tried them all), and everything to do with collective moral responsibility.

Jews never quite achieved the vision, but never ceased to be inspired by it. Moses' words still challenge us today. God has given us freedom. Let us use it to create a just, generous, gracious society. God does not do it for us but He has taught us how it is done. As Moses said: the choice is ours.

[1] Lord Acton, *Essays in the History of Liberty* (Liberty Press, 1985), 7

<https://vinnews.com/2025/08/21/the-new-ai-powered-hearing-aids-and-shabbos/>

The New AI-Powered Hearing Aids and Shabbos

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By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

WARNING: The following long article is not meant to be a Psak. The issues addressed here are merely an overview and a guide to the Marei Mekomos where the Psakim of the Gedolim of the previous generation may be found. If someone needs a Psak one should seek guidance from his own Rav or Posaik. Some of the topics may also fall under the purview of a “Velt Shailah” and require the ruling of today’s Gedolei HaPoskim. Please keep this in mind throughout the article and whatever comments you may have. For the sake of brevity, and for keeping to the attention span of the reader, the article was kept to below 5000 words.

Understanding Modern AI Hearing Aids

Today’s hearing aids are much smarter than the ones bubby and zaidy used to use. Modern hearing aids use AI – artificial intelligence – which means that they can think and learn like a computer brain. These devices don’t just make sounds louder – they can actually figure out what sounds are important and what sounds are just noise. Companies such as Starkey, Phonak, ReSound, Oticon, Signia, and Widex now make AI powered hearing aids that cost between about \$2,700 and \$3,300 a pair, but they do much more. They employ MLT, DNNT, and CES. This article will try to explain these three and the issues of Hilchos Shabbos, so please DoNN’T MeLT down and CuS. [With apologies, but it can perhaps be used as a mnemonic.]

Deep Neural Network Technology (DNNT)

DNNT is a highly advanced type of AI in hearing aids. Deep Neural Network attempts to copy how the brain normally hears sounds. Companies train these systems using millions of real-world sounds. For example, Oticon uses over 12 million sound samples to teach their hearing aids how to work more effectively.

Machine Learning Technology (MLT)

Machine learning means the hearing aid can learn from what you individually do. If the volume is always turned up in an environment where noisy restaurant background noise is heard – the AI powered hearing aid remembers this type of noise and automatically adjusts.

Constant Environmental Scanning (CES)

These hearing aids always check what is happening around you. Some models scan the environment 700 times each second. They can figure out if you are in a quiet room, a noisy restaurant, or outside in the wind. They then automatically adjust to help you hear better in each situation.

Major AI Hearing Aid Models

Starkey Edge AI and Genesis AI (\$3,198 per pair)

Starkey was the first company to make AI hearing aids in 2018. The newest model, the Edge AI, makes over 80 million sound adjustments each hour. The device can also count steps, detect if one has fallen down, and can even translate words into over 70 different languages.

The Edge AI has something called “Edge Mode Plus” that can be turned on by tapping the hearing aid twice or using a phone app. When this mode is on, the hearing aid works extra hard to help the wearer understand speech in very noisy places, but it also uses up the battery faster. One must check with one’s own Rav, but it is this author’s view that these two models are questionable.

Phonak Sphere Infinio (\$3,298 per pair)

Phonak makes hearing aids that scan the environment 700 times every second. Their newest model, the Sphere Infinio, has two computer chips instead of one. The extra chip is just for AI processing, which means it can do more advanced sound processing. The Sphere Infinio has a feature called “Spheric Speech Clarity” that helps you hear voices even when there’s a lot of background noise. Phonak says this provides 10 times better hearing in noisy places compared to older hearing aids.

ReSound Vivia (\$2,798 per pair)

ReSound’s newest AI hearing aid, the Vivia, is the smallest AI hearing aid made by a major company. Like the Phonak, it has two computer chips. The AI chip can do almost 5 trillion operations every day to help one hear better.

The Vivia has something called “Intelligent Focus” that automatically finds the voices you want to hear and reduces background noise. The battery lasts up to 30 hours on one charge, or 20 hours if using the AI features.

Oticon Intent (\$2,898 per pair)

Oticon makes hearing aids with “4D Sensor technology.” This means the hearing aid pays attention to four different things: the sounds around you, how you move your head, how your body moves, and whether you are having a conversation. It uses all this information to automatically adjust the sound.

The Intent hearing aid has something called “MoreSound Intelligence 3.0” that can reduce background noise by up to 12 decibels. That’s makes it easier to understand speech in noisy places.

Signia Pure Charge&Go IX (\$2,698 per pair)

Signia makes hearing aids that can track multiple people talking at the same time. Their IX hearing aids split sounds into separate streams, so they can process speech and background noise separately. This makes it easier to follow conversations when multiple people are talking.

These hearing aids also track your health by counting steps, measuring physical activity, and monitoring how much you interact with other people socially.

Widex Allure (\$2,798 per pair)

Widex uses AI differently than other companies. Instead of doing all the AI processing automatically, Widex hearing aids let you choose between two different sound options. The AI learns which option you prefer in different situations and then automatically makes those choices for you in the future.

Understanding the Basic Halachic Issues

Before we can understand the implications of the new AI hearing aids, we need to understand the underlying halachic issues of the old hearing aids on Shabbos.

The Issue of Boneh (Building)

The most serious D’oraisah concern regarding the old hearing aids was Boneh, which means “building.” This is one of the 39 types of work forbidden on Shabbos. When any electrical device is used, it may complete an electrical circuit, which some poskim consider a form of building because you are creating a new functional pathway.

The Chazon Ish was particularly strict about this. He believed that completing any electrical circuit on Shabbos violates the Biblical prohibition of Boneh. This is why the fact that the Chazon Ish allowed hearing aids was so significant – even though he was machmir about electricity, he made an exception for hearing aids when they were left on from before Shabbos. In Bnei Brak, the Poskim and the residents try to follow the Chazon Ish’s position on electricity, and thus for these Poskim, the new AI-powered hearing aids may present more of a halachic challenge.

The Issue of Increasing Electric Current

Another problem is whether increasing the flow of electricity through a device counts as forbidden work. When one turns up the volume on a hearing aid, more electricity flows through the circuits. Some poskim think this is a problem, while others allow it. The AI chips do cause more electricity to flow, and it seems to this author that some of the Bnei Brak Poskim may take issue with this.

The Issue of Making Sound (Hashma’as Kol)

There is also a question about whether making electronic sounds on Shabbos is forbidden. Some poskim worry that when you speak to someone with a hearing aid, you’re causing the device to create electronic sounds, which might be problematic. This is called Avusha Milsa or zilusa d’shabas.

The Issue of Muktzah

Muktzah refers to things one may not move on Shabbos. It is said that the Vilna Gaon once passed out just because he inadvertently touched Muktzah – where he did not even move it. Some poskim argued that hearing aids should be muktzah because they contain batteries, similar to how one may not move a lit candle on Shabbos.

The Issue of Hotza’ah – Carrying

Some hearing aids have parts that go in the pocket connected by wires to parts that go in your ear. In places without an eruv (a special boundary that allows carrying), wearing such a device might count as carrying, which is forbidden on Shabbos.

The Issue of Tikkun Manah (Fixing a Device)

When a hearing aid is not working properly and you fix it, that’s called tikkun manah. Changing from T-mode (for telephones) back to M-mode (for microphones) might count as fixing the device, which would be forbidden. Remember, before proceeding with any specific application, one must consult with one’s own Rav or Posaik.

Poskim Who Allowed the Old Hearing Aids

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l paskened (Igros Moshe OC IV §85) that people who are nearly deaf or hard of hearing may use hearing aids on Shabbos, but the hearing aid must be turned on before Shabbos starts. He understood that once the device is on, using it doesn’t create new electrical circuits.

Rav Henkin zt”l also allows hearing aids on Shabbos in Gvuros Eliyahu (vol. 1 §98:8, §102–103:1), but only if they are turned on before Shabbos in a way where one cannot accidentally change the settings during Shabbos. He recommended sealing the hearing aid controls to prevent accidental adjustments.

The Chazon Ish zt"l gave permission for hearing aids as long as they stay on from before Shabbos, as cited by Rav Unterman zt"l (see Shevet M'Yehuda Vol. II §35). This was remarkable because the Chazon Ish usually forbade any electrical activity that completed a circuit. However, he distinguished between turning on a device (which creates new circuits) and using a device that's already on.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l was the most meikil – lenient. In Shmiras Shabbos K'Hilchosah (34:28), he is cited that one may even adjust the volume on your hearing aid if needed. This is because he believed that increasing electric current in an already-functioning device does not violate Boneh nor the other D'oraisahs that other Poskim invoked. He explained that very rapid electrical changes, like those that happen when sound waves are converted to electrical signals, happen too quickly to count as completing circuits in a halachically significant way.

Addressing the Muktzah Concern

Several poskim, including Rav Moshe Heinemann shlita and lbc"l Rav Ovadia Yoseph (Yechaveh Daas vol. II §49), ruled that hearing aids are not muktzah. They explained that since the normal way of using a hearing aid is by wearing it on the body, the fact that it contains a battery does not make it like a lit candle that one cannot touch.

Addressing the Carrying Issue

For hearing aids with battery packs that go in the pocket, Rav Henkin suggested sewing the battery pack into the pocket before Shabbos so it becomes part of your clothing. However, other poskim like Rav Shlomo Zalman Braun disagreed and said this isn't necessary, comparing it to a person with a glass eye who does not need to worry about carrying the prosthetic.

The Basic Rules

There is a concept in halacha called, pok chazee mah amah d'bar – go out and see how the nation conducts itself, which Rav Yisroel Belsky zt"l once told me b'shaim Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, still applies today. Almost all poskim agreed on the following basic rules for the old hearing aids:

You can wear and use a hearing aid that was turned on before Shabbos. You cannot turn on a hearing aid on Shabbos because this violates a d'oraisah. You cannot change the batteries in a hearing aid on Shabbos because this is like rebuilding the device. If you forgot to turn it on before Shabbos, you can ask a goy to turn it on for you because a hard-of-hearing person has the status of a choleh she'ain bo sakanah (a sick person whose life is not in danger), which allows certain leniencies. Disagreements About Speaking to Hearing Aid Users

This is where poskim have some disagreements that will be very important for AI hearing aids.

The Lenient Position (Rav Shlomo Zalman zt"l)

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled (Minchas Shlomo vol. 1 §9) that you can speak directly to someone using a hearing aid on Shabbos. His reasoning had several parts: First, increasing electric current on Shabbos is permitted according to his understanding of the relevant halachos. Second, since only the person wearing the hearing aid hears the amplified sounds, it does not violate derabanan decrees against creating sound on Shabbos. Third, the electrical activity in hearing aids happens so quickly (thousands of times per second) that even the Chazon Ish would agree it doesn't constitute Boneh, since these are temporary circuits that open and close rapidly.

The Stricter Position

Rav Nissim Karelitz zt"l (Chut Shani Shabbos vol. 1 p. 205) and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (see Orchos Shabbos vol. III 26:23) ruled that you should not speak directly to someone wearing a hearing aid. They allowed talking to someone else within earshot of the hearing aid user, but not direct conversation.

Their concern is that the speaker's voice directly causes electrical activity within the hearing aid device. When speaking to someone with a hearing aid, your voice creates sound waves that the microphone converts to electrical signals, which then get amplified and processed. They view this as purposely causing electrical activity, which violates the prohibition of increasing electric current.

The Middle Position (Rav Feinstein)

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l took a middle position (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim vol. 4 §85). He maintained that optimally one should not speak directly to a person wearing a hearing aid on Shabbos, but in times of great need, there are reasons to be lenient. Rav Aharon Felder zt"l reported in Reshumei Aharon (vol. 2 OC §340:2) that Rav Moshe meant if you must speak directly to someone with a hearing aid, you should be careful not to speak directly into the device. [This is a game-changer in understanding Rav Moshe]

The Status of a Hard-of-Hearing Person in Halacha

An important principle underlying the kulah among many Poskim is that a person who is hard of hearing has a special status in halacha. Many poskim classify a hard-of-hearing person as a choleh she'ain bo sakanah – a sick person whose condition is not life-threatening. One must consult a Posaik for the particular person's status. This status allows certain leniencies on Shabbos that would not be permitted otherwise.

For example, most Poskim hold that you can ask a goy to turn on a hearing aid for someone who forgot to do it before Shabbos. You can even ask a non-Jew to change batteries if the hearing aid stops working during Shabbos.

Human Dignity (Kavod HaBriyos)

Many Poskim hold that the principle of kavod habriyos (human dignity) also supports leniencies for hearing aid use. Rav Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg zt"l explained (Tzitz Eliezer vol. VI §6:6) that even though allowing hearing aids might make people think other electrical devices are similarly permitted, we cannot institute new decrees of maris ayin (appearances of wrongdoing) in our generation.

Applying These Principles to AI Hearing Aids

Now that we understand all the underlying halachic issues, we can analyze how they may apply to AI hearing aids.

The Boneh Issue and AI Processing

The fundamental question is whether the millions of electronic operations that AI hearing aids perform constitute prohibited circuit completion.

According to Rav Shlomo Zalman's approach, these rapid electronic changes would likely also be permitted. He explained that electrical activity happening at the frequency of sound waves doesn't constitute Boneh because it happens too quickly and temporarily. AI processing, which happens even faster than basic sound processing, would likely fall under this ruling.

Even according to the Chazon Ish's strict approach, AI processing might be permitted when the device is turned on before Shabbos as a complete unit. The Chazon Ish allowed hearing aids because the circuits were completed before Shabbos, and for many of the devices – operation during Shabbos doesn't create new circuits. AI processing that happens within an already-activated system would follow the same logic. But we need further guidance from the Gedolei HaPoskim.

The Electric Current Issue and Machine Learning

Machine learning algorithms constantly adjust the hearing aid's electronic settings, which means they're constantly changing the flow of electric current through different parts of the device.

Rav Auerbach zt"l would likely permit this because he allowed adjusting current flow in hearing aids. In fact, machine learning adjustments are even more automatic than manual volume adjustments, so they would be more clearly permitted.

Other poskim who are concerned about increasing current might rule stringently, but even they may perhaps permit automatic adjustments that happen without user intervention when configured before Shabbos.

The Muktzah Issue and Multi-Function Devices

Modern AI hearing aids don't just amplify sound – they also track health, count steps, monitor heart rate, detect falls, and perform other functions. This raises the question of whether they're primarily hearing aids or primarily electronic health devices.

It is hard to tell at this point, but a view may emerge that these are primarily hearing aids with additional features, similar to how a digital watch with multiple functions is still primarily a watch. As long as hearing amplification remains the main purpose, the additional AI features may not necessarily change the muktzah status – but the issue must be presented to Gedolei HaPoskim. [Preferably by a person who can present the issue without his own hearing issues.]

The Carrying Issue and Wireless Connectivity

Unlike older hearing aids with wires connecting ear pieces to battery packs, modern AI hearing aids are typically wireless and self-contained. This eliminates most carrying concerns. However, some AI hearing aids can connect wirelessly to external devices like smartphones or remote microphones which may be a problem.

***A Yesoma is getting married soon. If anyone wishes to donate toward the chasunah please click here. <https://shulspace.org/yeshiva-of-kings-bay/donationForm?CN=1487>

For Shabbos use, any wireless connections to external devices would need to be disabled before Shabbos. The hearing aids themselves, being self-contained units worn on the body, may not necessarily present carrying issues. Once again, before making determinations about specific AI features, one should consult with their Rav or Posaik.

Analysis by Type of AI Feature

When AI hearing aids automatically recognize that you are in a noisy shul that talks (a topic beyond the scope of this article) versus a quiet room and adjust accordingly, this involves:

Electronic sound analysis happening thousands of times per second Automatic adjustments to amplification, noise reduction, and directional microphones Electronic storage and retrieval of learned preferences Since these are automatic functions that happen as part of the device's normal operation when turned on before Shabbos, most poskim would probably permit them. The electronic activity is similar to basic sound amplification but more sophisticated.

The constant electronic adjustments might cause concern for poskim who forbid increasing current, but since the adjustments are automatic and the device is configured before Shabbos, even strict poskim may likely permit basic AI functions. Deep Neural Network Processing

DNN processing involves millions or billions of electronic operations per day, attempting to mimic brain function in processing sound. Single-chip systems (like Starkey Edge AI, Oticon Intent) may perhaps be treated like advanced versions of regular hearing aids. The neural network processing happens within the device's normal operation.

Dual-chip systems (like Phonak Sphere Infinio, ReSound Viviva) have a separate processor dedicated to AI functions. However, since both chips are activated together before Shabbos as parts of one integrated device, this may not necessarily create additional halachic issues.

Constant Environmental Scanning

AI hearing aids that scan the environment hundreds of times per second and make automatic adjustments might be permitted for the same reasons as basic machine learning. The frequency of scanning doesn't change the halachic analysis – Rav Auerbach's principle about rapid electrical changes may even apply more to very frequent scanning.

Health and Fitness Tracking

Step counting, activity monitoring, heart rate tracking, and other health features operate through sensors that are part of the hearing aid hardware. Since these features operate automatically and hearing amplification remains the primary purpose, they may perhaps eventually be permitted according to the lenient view. The sensors function passively without requiring user activation during Shabbos.

Fall detection might also be permitted, and perhaps eventually be permitted due to pikuach nefesh (life-saving) considerations. Once again, this requires a psak from a Rav or Posaik.

Interactive AI Features

App-Controlled Features: Using smartphone apps to control AI hearing aids would likely be forbidden according to all poskim, as it involves operating electronic devices on Shabbos without a Pikuach Nefesh heter. **Manual AI Mode Activation:** Features like Starkey's "Edge Mode+" that can be activated by tapping the device would likely be forbidden because they involve actively turning on additional electronic functions during Shabbos since there is no Pikuach Nefesh element. **Internet-Connected Features:** Translation services, transcription, or any features requiring internet connectivity would likely be forbidden as they involve telecommunications and remote electronic operations. **Speaking to People with AI Hearing Aids** This is where the pre-existing disagreement among poskim becomes more complex with AI technology.

When you speak to someone with an AI hearing aid, your voice triggers:

Millions of neural network calculations per second
Real-time environmental analysis and adjustment
Machine learning algorithm updates
Much more intensive electronic processing than traditional hearing aids
Rav Auerbach's Approach Applied to AI
Following Rav Auerbach's reasoning, speaking to someone with an AI hearing aid may be permitted because:

The electronic activity, while more intensive, still happens automatically as part of the device's normal operation
The rapid electronic changes occur at frequencies that don't constitute halachically significant circuit completion
Increasing electronic current and processing is permitted when it's part of the device's intended function
Since Rav Auerbach explicitly permitted speaking to people with traditional hearing aids, and AI processing is just more advanced versions of the same electronic sound processing, he would likely have permitted speaking to people with AI hearing aids as well.

Strict Approaches Applied to AI

Poskim who were concerned about the electronic activity caused by speaking to traditional hearing aid users might be more concerned about AI hearing aids because: The electronic processing is more intensive
The electronic activity extends beyond basic amplification to complex computational processing
However, even the stricter poskim might permit it because the AI processing is automatic when configured before Shabbos.

Practical Considerations

For most people following the halachic approaches that have emerged in the past few decades, speaking normally to someone with an AI hearing aid would likely be permitted. The AI process operates on the same basic principle of automatic electronic sound processing that many poskim already permit.

Those following stricter approaches to electricity on Shabbos might want to consult with a posek who understands AI technology, since the electronic processing is significantly more intensive than what earlier poskim were considering.

Special AI Features

Some AI hearing aids can translate foreign languages or transcribe speech to text.

These features typically require internet connectivity and cloud processing.

Internet-based translation would likely be forbidden according to all poskim because it involves telecommunications activity, remote server processing, potential commercial transactions (data usage), and operating complex electronic systems beyond the basic hearing aid function.

Local translation that works entirely within the hearing aid's processors might be more analogous to permitted automatic AI functions, but it would still involve significant new electronic activity beyond sound amplification.

Voice Assistants and Smart Features

Integration with Siri, Google Assistant, or similar systems would clearly be forbidden as it involves internet connectivity and operating external electronic systems.

Health Emergency Features

Fall detection and emergency calling features present an interesting case because they involve pikuach nefesh considerations.

Fall detection that operates through motion sensors would be permitted and probably required because it could save lives. Automatic emergency calling would also be permitted when it activates automatically in response to detected emergencies, since pikuach nefesh overrides Shabbos restrictions.

User-activated emergency features (like pressing a button to call for help) would also be permitted under pikuach nefesh principles.

Practical Guidelines for Different Approaches

For Followers of the More Lenient View (Rav Auerbach, Rav Feinstein, Rav Henkin)

AI hearing aids with automatic functions would be broadly permitted when:

The devices are turned on and fully configured before Shabbos
All AI features operate automatically without user intervention during Shabbos
Internet connectivity and smartphone apps are disabled
Battery life is sufficient for the entire Shabbos period
Special boost modes that drain batteries quickly are avoided before Shabbos
Speaking to people with AI hearing aids would likely be permitted, and the intensive AI processing would be viewed as an advanced form of the permitted electronic sound processing.

For Followers of Stricter Positions (Rav Karelitz, Rav Elyashiv)

Even strict poskim may perhaps permit:

Basic AI processing when the device is turned on before Shabbos as a complete unit
Automatic environmental adaptation and sound processing
Health monitoring sensors operating passively
Fall detection due to pikuach nefesh considerations
They might prefer:

Avoiding the most intensive AI processing modes
Speaking to someone else within earshot rather than directly to the AI hearing aid user
Consulting with a posek about specific AI features that go significantly beyond traditional sound amplification

Universal Prohibitions Across All Positions

All poskim would likely forbid:

Using smartphone apps to control hearing aids during Shabbos
Manually activating AI boost modes or special features
Using voice commands to control the devices

Accessing internet-connected features like translation or transcription
Changing batteries or charging devices during Shabbos
Any active electronic troubleshooting or device management
Each person should clarify with their own Rav or Posaik which approach to follow.

Preparing AI Hearing Aids for Shabbos

Technical Preparation

Turn on all desired automatic AI features before Shabbos begins
Ensure battery levels are adequate for extended use, considering that AI processing consumes more power
Disable or disconnect internet-based features and smartphone app connectivity
Set the devices to automatic operation mode rather than manual control modes
Test that all automatic functions are working properly
Some users may want to put tape over manual controls to prevent accidental activation, following Rav Henkin's approach for traditional hearing aids.

Understanding Your Device's AI Features

Before Shabbos, users should understand which of their hearing aid's features operate automatically and which require manual activation. Features that work automatically when the device is on (like environmental scanning, basic noise reduction, and health monitoring) would generally be permitted. Features that require activation during use (like special boost modes, voice commands, or app-based adjustments) would be forbidden.

Battery Management for AI Hearing Aids

Since AI processing uses significantly more battery power than traditional hearing aids, battery management becomes more critical for Shabbos observance.

For rechargeable hearing aids, ensure full charging before Shabbos. For battery-powered models, consider changing to fresh batteries before Shabbos if current batteries are not at full capacity. Avoid using power-intensive AI modes before Shabbos if battery life is a concern.

Questions About Multi-Day Yom Tov

When Shabbos is combined with Yom Tov for multiple consecutive days, AI hearing aids present additional challenges due to their higher power consumption.

For multi-day holidays, users need to ensure their hearing aids can operate for the entire period without charging or battery changes. Some poskim permit asking a non-Jew to charge devices or change batteries on Yom Tov (though not on Shabbos) when necessary for a choleh she'ein bo sakanah.

The power-intensive nature of AI processing makes planning even more important for extended holiday periods.

For specific guidance on multi-day holiday situations, consult with your Rav or Posaik.

Future Developments and Halachic Considerations

Emerging AI Technologies

Future AI hearing aids may include even more sophisticated features like:

Individual voice recognition that learns to identify specific family members or friends

Advanced health monitoring that can detect medical emergencies beyond falls

Integration with smart home systems for automated environmental control

More sophisticated language processing and communication assistance

Halachic Framework for New Technologies

The basic framework established by poskim for hearing aids and applied to AI features will likely continue to apply:

Automatic functions that operate as part of the device's normal operation when turned on before Shabbos will generally be permitted

Features requiring active user control during Shabbos will be forbidden

Internet connectivity and external device control will remain problematic

Health and safety features will benefit from pikuach nefesh considerations

The Need for Ongoing Consultation

As AI hearing aids become more sophisticated, the technology may go beyond what current poskim have considered.

Users of advanced AI hearing aids should maintain contact with poskim who understand both the technology and the relevant halachic principles.

The rapid pace of technological development means that new features may require fresh halachic analysis, building on the established framework but considering new technological capabilities.

Conclusion: Technology in Service of Human Dignity

AI hearing aids represent a remarkable advancement that can dramatically improve people's ability to hear, communicate, and participate fully in family and community life.

Rav Waldenberg's insight that we cannot create endless new restrictions for technological advances (Responsa Tzitz Eliezer vol. 6 §6:6) remains relevant. The sophisticated AI processing that makes modern hearing aids so effective may serve the same fundamental purpose as traditional hearing aids – restoring the ability to hear and participate in human communication, but this needs to be addressed by Gedolei haPoskim.

The key is understanding the technology well enough to distinguish between automatic functions that operate as part of the device's intended purpose and interactive features that require active control. When AI hearing aids are properly configured before Shabbos and used only in automatic mode, they can possibly provide remarkable benefits while respecting the framework of Shabbos observance.

As Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's approach demonstrates, rapid electronic activity that happens automatically as part of a device's intended function does not necessarily constitute prohibited melachah on Shabbos. This principle, established for much simpler hearing aids, may extend naturally to the sophisticated AI processing that makes modern hearing aids so effective.

For anyone considering AI hearing aids, consultation with both hearing healthcare providers and knowledgeable poskim is essential. As with all complex halachic matters, final decisions should always be made in consultation with one's own Rav or Posaik.

Remember to always ask your own Rav. May we all be zocheh to hear the great Shofar blast of the Geulah soon!

The author can be reached at yairhoffman2@gmail.com

Tidbits • Parashas Re'eh 5785 In Memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoaah.org> Unsubscribe Thu, Aug 21, 7:56 PM (4 hours ago) to me

Parashas Re'eh • August 23rd • 29 Av 5785

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Elul. Rosh Chodesh is Sunday & Monday, August 24th-25th. The molad is Motzaei Shabbos at 11:26 PM and 6 chalakim.

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Tuesday night, August 26th. The final opportunity is Motzaei Shabbos, September 6th.

Although it is Erev Rosh Chodesh, most lein the haftarah of AniYa So'ara, continuing with the third of the seven haftaros of consolation, and do not lein the haftarah of Machar Chodesh. Some add pesukim from the haftarah of Machar Chodesh as well. Tzidkas'cha is omitted at minchah.

As Rosh Chodesh begins on Motzaei Shabbos, one who extends his seudas shelishis eating past sundown is in a quandary as to whether to say Retzei, or Ya'aleh Veyavo, or both, in bentching. Some are careful not to eat bread after tzeis hakochavim (for this purpose 35-40 minutes after shekiya) and then only say Retzei. Speak to your Rav.

On the second day of Rosh Chodesh, we begin adding LeDavid Hashem Ori at the end of davening. Nusach Ashkenaz adds LeDavid at Maariv and Shacharis and will begin on Sunday night during Maariv. Nusach Sefard adds LeDavid at Shacharis and

Minchah and will begin with Shacharis on Monday. The Shofar is sounded along with LeDavid at Shacharis on weekdays. LeDavid is added through Shemini Atzeres.

Many Sefardim begin saying Selichos on the second day of Chodesh Elul.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 5

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Avodah Zara 66 • Yerushalmi: Pesachim 86. The Siyum on Yerushalmi Pesachim is Shabbos Parashas Re'eh. Yerushalmi Shekalim begins next • Mishnah Yomis: Zevachim 11:7-8 • Oraysa (coming week): Moed Katan 21a-23a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 203:3-204:5

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Rosh Hashanah begins on Monday evening, September 22nd.

Yom Kippur begins on Wednesday evening, October 1st.

Succos begins on Monday evening, October 6th.

RE'EH: The blessings for those who keep the mitzvot and the curses for those who reject them • Upon entering the land, you must accept the mitzvot upon yourself at Har Gerizim and Har Eival, and recognize their accompanying reward and punishment

• Drive out the nations and destroy their gods • In a designated place [the Beis Hamikdash] you will serve Hashem • Laws of Korbanos • Do not practice idolatry • Keeping kosher • Laws of a Jewish slave • Firstborn animals • Yomim Tovim • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvot.

Haftarah: The haftarah (Yeshaya 54:11-55:5) relays the promise that Hashem will one day redeem us from exile. During all the years of exile He will safeguard us from the spiritual and physical oppression brought by other nations.

Parashas Re'eh: 126 Pesukim • 17 Obligations • 38 Prohibitions

1) Destroy avodah zarah. 2) Do not destroy holy items. 3) Fulfill vows for korbanos or bedek habayis on the first chag after the vow is made. 4-5) Bring korbanos to the Beis HaMikdash; do not bring korbanos elsewhere. 6) Blemished korbanos should be redeemed and purchased anew. 7-9) Do not eat Ma'aser Sheini outside of Yerushalayim. 10) Do not eat a Bechor animal outside Yerushalayim. 11) Do not eat Kodashim outside their designated place. 12) Do not eat from a korban olah. 13) Do not eat meat of a korban before the sprinkling of its blood. 14) Do not eat Bikkurim prior to placing them in the Temple Courtyard. 15) Do not withhold the Levi'im's gifts. 16) Perform Shechitah prior to eating meat. 17) Do not eat Eiver Min Hachai (meat from a living animal). 18) Bring korbanos personally to the Mikdash. 19-20) Do not add or subtract mitzvot from the Torah. 21) Do not listen to a prophet of avodah zarah. 22-26) Do not heed or befriend a meisis (one who influences others to sin); do not absolve your hatred for him; do not save his life or defend him in judgment. 27) Do not missionize for idolatry or become missionized. 28) Review witnesses' testimony. 29-31) Burn down an idolatrous city; do not rebuild it or benefit from its spoils. 32-33) Do not cut yourself or pull-out hair in grief. 34) Do not eat disqualified Kodashim. 35) Check birds for signs of kashrus. 36) Do not eat flying insects. 37) Do not eat Neveilah. 38) Separate Ma'aser Sheini. 39) Give Ma'aser Ani. 40,42) Do not collect a debt after shemittah, rather consider it dismissed. 41) Collect debt from a non-Jew promptly. 43-44) Do not withhold charity or kindness from any Jew; give charity generously and graciously. 45) Do not refrain from lending before shemittah. 46-47) Do not send away a servant or maid-servant empty handed; rather, provide them with gifts. 48-49) Do not work with a korban animal or shear its wool. 50) Do not eat chametz after midday on Erev Pesach. 51) Do not leave over meat from the Korban Chagigah. 52) Do not sacrifice a Korban Pesach on a private bamah. 53) V'samachta B'chagecha. 54-55) Go up for Aliyah L'regel and do not come empty handed.

"גִּלְגָּלֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְדַעְתֶּם וְנִשְׁבָּדֶם" Let us seek foreign gods whom are foreign to us and serve them (Devarim 13:3)

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would explain that this pasuk admonishes an idol worshiper: Aside from the gravity of the sin, a lack of focus and basic "seichel" caused him to overlook the obvious and serve a powerless idol and an entity with no real power. Man's greatness is seen in his ability to override his inclination and desires and act according to his intellect. A deficiency in this regard displays animal-like behavior, and a lacking in the greatness of man.

Rav Chatzkel would comment that upon beginning the month of Elul, one must contemplate the absurdity of coming before Hashem on the upcoming holiday of Rosh Hashanah to ask of Him continued blessing without contemplating and making an accounting of his deeds and activities. Only after stopping and thinking what one can offer Hashem is it possible to ask Him for a sweet new year.

In memory of Rav Avraham Pam ZTL's Yahrzeit today Friday 28 Av, I am

including this from next week's parsha Shoftim, re Hakaras Hatov, which was a theme that Rav Pam mentioned often. CS

The Measure of A Person Is His Sense of Gratitude

Parshas Shoftim Posted on August 23, 2017 (5777) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand I

Series: Rav Frand I Level: Intermediate This dvar Torah was adapted from the

hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes Good Shabbos!

The Torah admonishes judges not to show favoritism, not to corrupt justice, and not to take bribes "for bribes will blind the eyes of the wise and will pervert the words of the righteous" [Devorim 16:19]. No person is immune from the temptations of a bribe. Bribes attack a person's ability to judge fairly. Even if a person is righteous and even if he is extremely wise — he is not above falling prey to the power of a bribe.

The Gemara in Kesuvos [105b] states: "It goes without saying that monetary bribes are forbidden, but the Torah is coming to teach us that even 'verbal bribes' are forbidden." Flattery, kind words, and so forth can all affect a person's judgment. The Gemara lists several incidents demonstrating how particular Amoraim of the Talmud acted regarding rejecting bribes.

Shmuel was having difficulty crossing a rickety bridge. A certain person stuck out his hand and helped him cross the bridge. Shmuel asked what brought him to the bridge right then. The person told Shmuel that he had a case to be heard in Shmuel's court for adjudication. Shmuel disqualified himself from being a judge in the case since he had just received a favor from this person.

Similarly, Ameimar was sitting in court and a feather flew on top of his head. A fellow came over and removed the feather. When he told Ameimar that he was there to have his case heard, Ameimar disqualified himself from hearing the case.

A third Amora related incident involved Mar Ukva. Someone spat in front of Mar Ukva and another person came along and covered up the saliva. Mar Ukva disqualified himself from hearing the case of the person who did him the favor of covering up the saliva. A final case involved Rav Shmuel b'Reb Yossi and his sharecropper. The sharecropper who normally delivered produce to Rav Shmuel b'Reb Yossi every Friday showed up early one week and delivered the produce on Thursday because he had to be in town that day for a Din Torah. Rav Shmuel b'Reb Yossi disqualified himself from hearing the case, lest he be "bribed" by the favor of the early delivery that week. Rav Pam, zt"l, asked a question about this narration: Are we to infer that these Amoraim were so fickle that the slightest favor could influence them? What's the big deal about any of these matters? Did these Amoraim have such little backbone that they could be swayed by trivial and incidental matters? Rav Pam said that the lesson of this

Gemara is not so much about judicial integrity or the corrosive nature of bribes. The major lesson that this passage of Talmud teaches is the concept of Hakaras HaTov [gratitude]. This Gemara teaches us how indebted each of these Amoraim felt to anyone who did them even the slightest favor. Such matters would be insignificant to us. As a result of our insensitivity to the proper attribute of Hakaras HaTov, such favors do not even register on our radar screens as necessitating any gratitude on our part. We do not even consider them favors. However, people who are highly sensitive to the attribute of showing gratitude do consider these kindnesses to be favors, worthy in fact of favors in return.

Rav Pam explains that many of the problems in our society indeed stem from the lack of appreciation of one's obligation for Hakaras HaTov. Husbands take the kindnesses that wives do for them for granted and wives take for granted the things that husbands do for them. Everybody has expectations of the other party in a marriage because "that's their job!" "Why should they get 'Extra credit' for merely doing their job?" If each spouse would see the things done for them as a favor which needs to be recognized, marriages would be far happier and far more stable. The same is true in employer-employee relationships and in virtually all other relationships as well!

Posted on August 23, 2017 (5777) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand I Series: Rav Frand I Level: Intermediate

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion. Good Shabbos! The Torah admonishes judges not to show favoritism, not to corrupt justice, and not to take bribes "for bribes will blind the eyes of the wise and will pervert the words of the righteous" [Devorim 16:19]. No person is immune from the temptations of a bribe. Bribes attack a person's ability to judge fairly. Even if a person is righteous and even if he is extremely wise — he is not above falling prey to the power of a bribe. The Gemara in Kesuvos [105b] states: "It goes without saying that monetary bribes are forbidden, but the Torah is coming to teach us that even 'verbal bribes' are forbidden." Flattery, kind words, and so forth can all affect a person's judgment. The Gemara lists several incidents demonstrating how particular Amoraim of the Talmud acted regarding rejecting bribes.

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Rav Kook, when yet a Rav in Europe, before moving to Eretz Yisrael spent time in the summers on the Baltic seacoast in Latvia, as was the custom of many European Rabbonim. There was a hall there where they made minyanim. Rav Reuvain Bengas happened to be there one evening and had Yahrzeit. There were only nine people in the hall, so one of the people in the hall went outside looking for a tenth Jew for the minyan for Rav Reuvain's Yahrzeit. Meanwhile, outside there was a certain fellow also trying to form a minyan and he had an exact minyan. The person from the hall did not realize this and pulled one person from the outside group into the hall for the inside minyan. Although this was all unintentional, the person who organized the minyan outside stormed into the hall and started yelling at Rav Bengas and heaping insults upon him. Rav Kook, well-known for his great Ahavas Yisrael for every Jew, nevertheless went to the person who was berating Rav Bengas and slapped him across his face for embarrassing a Talmid Chochom. The slapped person got so furious at Rav Kook that he decided to take him to the secular court for assaulting him. A whole commotion developed. A number of people asked Rav Kook to just apologize so that the matter would not go any further. Rav Kook refused. He said if this was just for my honor I could apologize, but this involves the honor of Rav Bengas who was shamed. I am not sorry I slapped him. I had to stand up for the honor of a Talmud Chochom. Let this person take me to court! A few days passed, however, and the fellow had a change of heart. He came into Rav Kook and apologized and told him he was not going to take him to court. Seemingly that was the end of the story. Years later, Rav Kook came to America and he was approached by the person who he had slapped years earlier in the Latvian seacoast town. He told Rav Kook "I cannot thank the Rabbi enough. I owe you a great debt of gratitude." He then took out a gold watch and gave it to Rav Kook. He explained that after Rav Kook slapped him, his life became miserable in Europe. As a result of that tumultuous incident, he became notoriously known as the Jew who yelled at Rav Bengas and the Jew who was slapped by Rav Kook. He had no choice but to leave Europe and go to America where no one knew him. In America, he became a millionaire! He felt his good fortune was all the result of the slap of Rav Kook and wanted to show Hakaras HaTov to him. Sometimes we should feel gratitude even for a slap in the face! Likewise, the Amoraim felt a super sensitivity for gratitude even for trivial matters. The same is true of righteous Jews in every generation. The Chofetz Chaim was a Kohen and could not attend funerals. A woman who had once donated a window to his Yeshiva in Radin died. (This was a simple window — not a fancy stained glass window.) Even though the Chofetz Chaim could not enter the cemetery and despite his old age, he walked a long distance behind

the casket to the cemetery to accompany the body to burial, as Hakaras HaTov for the donation of the window. If only we would recognize the obligation to recognize favors — however small — the world would be a far better place! Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig 5774

Body And Soul "You are children to Hashem, your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves..." (14:1) The Torah juxtaposes the statement "**banim atem laHashem**" - "you are children to Hashem" to the prohibition "lo sigsodedu" - "you shall not lacerate yourselves". Rashi explains that since we are Hashem's children we should not deface our bodies.¹ The Talmud teaches that there are three partners in the creation of a human being, the father, the mother and Hashem. Parents supply the child with physical characteristics and Hashem supplies the child with a soul.² Why does the verse describe our relationship with Hashem as His children in the context of safeguarding our physical form? From the expression "lo sigsodedu" the Talmud derives the prohibition against separate factions observing divergent Halachic practices within the same community ("aggudos" - "groups").³ Since the prohibitions against lacerating ourselves and having separate factions are both derived from the same expression, a unifying thread between them must exist. What do they have in common? In the first paragraph of the Shema we are commanded to teach our children Torah, "veshinantam levanacha".⁴ Rashi comments that "your children" refers to "your students" for a person's students are considered as his children. To support this notion Rashi cites our verse in Parshas Re'eh, "banim atem laHashem" - "you are children to Hashem".⁵ How does this verse indicate that a person's students are his children? It is apparent from Rashi's comments that he understands that through the study of Hashem's Torah we become His students, and can therefore be referred to as His children. The Mishna teaches that a person is obligated to return his teacher's lost object prior to returning an object lost by his father, for his father provides him with a finite existence while his teacher offers him an infinite existence.⁶ The Torah taught by his teacher not only guarantees the soul an infinite existence, but also elevates the body given to him by his father from a physical and finite state to a spiritual and eternal state. Although Hashem is clearly the source of the soul, Torah study enables the body to be perceived as a product of the same source. This message is punctuated by the commandment against lacerating our bodies because we are Hashem's children; through Torah study we become His students and thereby His children, body and soul. The reconciliation between body and soul is the ultimate proof that we emanate from one source. Since only the Torah is able to accomplish this reconciliation, it is of the utmost importance that the Torah itself be viewed as emanating from one source. Any action distorting this truth undermines the efficacy of the Torah to unite and reconcile all apparent divergent forces in creation. It is therefore self-evident that separate factions observing divergent Halachic practices within the same community cannot be tolerated. 1.14:1 2.Niddah 31a 3.Yevamos 13b 4.6:7 5.Ibid 6.Bava Metziah 33a

Bonim Atem Lamakom - You are children to Hashem, your G-d." (Reeh 14:1).

<https://thebjh.com/we-are-hashems-children/>

Rabbi Avrohom Sebrov

This time of year is designated for teshuva. We really should be paralyzed with fear because of the impending judgment. Yet, there is a contradiction. On Rosh Hashana, we enjoy festive meals. Nice clothing should be worn. Haircuts are taken in preparation for the holiday. How could there be rejoicing when facing an intense court case, where life and death hang in the balance? HaRav Shaya Cohe, shlit"a, Rosh HaYeshiva Yeshivas Zichron Aryeh, often explained this dichotomy with a parable. A prisoner is shaking uncontrollably with fear. He is being brought into court to hear his fate. Charged with capital crimes, the prisoner fears for the worst. Yet, when the doors to the courtroom open, he is astonished to see that the judge is his own father! Immediately, a sense of relief envelopes him. True, he still faces judgment, but he knows his sentence will be meted out with compassion. During this time of year, we all face judgment. However, Hashem is the Av HaRachaman, the Most Merciful Father. Knowledge of this allows us to feel some measure of confidence in the graciousness of the judgment. The pasuk states, "You are children to Hashem, your G-d." (Devarim 14:1). It is with immense love that Hashem considers us to be His children. There is a caveat, however. Rebbe Yehuda states taht the Bnei Yisrael are only called Hashem's children when they are following the proper path (Kiddushin 36a). Yet, Rebbe Meir vehemently disagrees. He states that even when Klal Yisrael sin, they are still called Hashem's children. He cites a verse in Yirmiya (4:22), "They are foolish sons." Even when Klal Yisrael acts foolishly, they still have the appellation of Hashem's children. More so, even when Klal Yisrael is considered wicked, they are

still deemed Hashem's children. As proof, Rebbe Meir cites the verse, "Sons in whom there is no faithfulness" (Devarim 32:20). Even when Klal Yisrael worships idols, which is considered a brazen sin, they are still considered Hashem's children. Proof of this can be found in the verse, "A seed of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly" (Yeshaya 1:4). Rebbe Meir cites one more verse to bolster his position, but it isn't readily clear what his intent is: "And it shall come to pass that, instead of what was said to them: You are not My people, it shall be said to them: Sons of the living G-d" (Hoshea 2:1).

Rashi notes that in the first few verses cited, Klal Yisrael are indeed called sons, but they have negative descriptors appended to their titles. They are called foolish sons, faithless sons, and corrupt sons. Can the relationship be repaired? What can Klal Yisrael do to regain their original glorious appellation of simply "Hashem's children"? The answer is teshuva. Teshuva is so powerful that even if Klal Yisrael sinned grievously, the relationship with their Creator can still be repaired. As proof of this fact, Rebbe Meir cites the verse, "Sons of the living G-d." Klal Yisrael can regain their good name. HaRav Yosef Trani, the Maharit (1568– 1639), is at a loss to explain Rashi. While Hashem's acceptance of teshuva is a magnificent act of kindness and charity, it is no secret. Indeed, even Rebbe Yehuda, who disagrees with Rebbe Meir, would nevertheless concede this point. Rebbe Yehuda would likewise say that Klal Yisrael can regain their good name by doing teshuva. Why did Rebbe Meir feel the need to support the power of teshuva from a new verse? Elsewhere, the Gemara cites many different verses to demonstrate the power of teshuva. Why does the Gemara seem to suggest that Rebbe Yehuda would argue on this point? The Maharit offers a different interpretation of the final step in Rebbe Meir's exposition. Even before Klal Yisrael does teshuva, they are still called wonderful sons! At the same time that they are called corrupt, foolish, and faithless, they are also still called simply "Hashem's sons." This demonstrates the intense love that Hashem has for us that even when we sin grievously, we are still his beloved sons. The Maharit is an Acharon, albeit an early Acharon, and he is nevertheless arguing with a Rishon. Yet support for his position can be found in the words of another Rishon, the Rashba. The Rashba is of the opinion that the graves of idolaters do not transmit tumah via ohel. (Other Rishonim disagree. Fascinatingly, part of the debate is based on the question of whether Eliyahu Hanavi was a Kohen or did he come from a different shevet, perhaps Gad or Binyamin?) Therefore, the Rashba was asked if a Jew renounced his religion R"L, and adopted pagan beliefs, does his grave still transmit tumah via ohel, or is his grave considered like one of an idolater's?

Among other sources, the Rashba cites our Gemara. Rebbe Meir is of the opinion that even if a Jew practices idolatry, he would still be called Hashem's son! The person who died is likewise called Hashem's son, and his grave would transmit tumah via ohel. The Rashba cited the entire Gemara to bolster his proof. Apparently, he is of the opinion that the entire Gemara, even the last verse, is discussing a person's moniker before he does teshuva. Therefore, he ruled that the grave of the person who died before he did teshuva still transmits tumah via ohel. Even though generally, the halacha follows Rebbe Yehuda when he argues with Rebbe Meir, that rule doesn't apply in this case. The halacha accords with Rebbe Meir that we are called Hashem's sons even when we sin. According to the Rashba, we are even called beloved sons before doing teshuva. This is a powerful lesson that we should have in mind during these days. The Yetzer Hara may want to convince us that we are worthless in the eyes of Hashem; we are simply beyond redemption. That is simply untrue. Hashem loves us even in the state we are in and looks forward to our teshuva.

Rabbi Avrohom Sebrov is a rebbe at Yeshiva Ateres Shimon in Far Rockaway. In addition, Rabbi Sebrov leads a daf yomi chaburah at Eitz Chayim of Dogwood Park in West Hempstead, NY. He can be contacted at ASebrov@gmail.com.

<https://heichalhanegina.blogspot.com/2007/05/rabbi-meir-baal-haness-rabbi-yehuda-bar.html>

RABBI MEIR BAAL HANESS

Pesach Sheini is and the yahrzeit of two veritable giants of the Mishna – Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda. And as we mentioned last year, we have begun, in our counting of the Omer, the Sefira of Hod. The Zohar says that during this week, the "gates are open." Many Chassidim don't say Tachanun this entire week! The entrance to the Shul and the Tziyon of Rabbi Meir in Tiveria Many of us know that a "stam" Mishna, a Mishna without the name of its author, is that of Rabbi Meir. And while we know that he is called Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess ("the Master of the Miracle"), do we know why? The Gemara relates the following story:

Rabbi Meir was married to Bruria, the daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, one of the ten martyrs. The government ordered Rabbi Chanina and his wife executed for teaching Torah publicly. They decreed that his daughter - Bruria's sister - should live a life of shame. She was placed in a brothel. Bruria asked her husband to save her sister. Rabbi Meir took a bag of gold coins and said to himself, "If she has remained chaste, a miracle will occur for her, and if not, there won't be a miracle." He then went to the brothel disguised as a Roman horseman, and asked her to sleep with him. She refused,

claiming she was in the midst of her menses. When he offered to wait until it was over, she said, "There are many other women here that are more beautiful than I." He then realized that she used this tactic whenever she was approached, and deemed that Bruria's sister had kept her chastity. Then he offered the gold coins as a bribe to the guard. The guard replied, "When my supervisor comes, he will notice one missing and kill me."

Rabbi Meir answered, "Take half the money for yourself, and use the other half to bribe the officials." The guard continued, "And when there is no more money, and the supervisors come - then what will I do?"

Rabbi Meir answered, "Say, 'The G-d of Meir - answer me!' and you will be saved."

Eloka D'Meir Aneini

The guard asked, "And how can I be guaranteed that this will save me?"

Rabbi Meir replied, "Look - there are man-eating dogs over there. I will go to them and you will see for yourself." Rabbi Meir walked over to the dogs, threw a clump of dirt at them, and they ran at him to tear him apart. He cried, "G-d of Meir - answer me!" and the dogs retreated. The guard was convinced, and he gave him the girl.

When the group of supervisors came, the guard bribed them with the money.

Eventually, the money was used up, and it was publicized what had happened. They arrested the guard and sentenced him to death by hanging. They tied the rope around his neck and he said, "G-d of Meir - answer me!" The rope tore, much to everyone's amazement. He told them the incident, and they went after Rabbi Meir. The guard was saved.

The Romans then engraved Rabbi Meir's likeness on the gates of Rome and proclaimed that anyone seeing a person resembling it should bring him in. One day [some Romans] saw him and ran after him, so he ran away from them and entered a harlot's house. [So as not to be identified as Rabbi Meir, who naturally would not enter such a place.]

Others say he happened just then to see food cooked by goyim [heathens], and he dipped in one finger and then sucked the other. [He appeared to be eating it, even though he didn't].

Others again say that Eliyahu HaNavi [Elijah the Prophet] appeared to them as a harlot who embraced him. "G-d forbid," they said, "if this was Rabbi Meir, he would not have acted like this!" [and they left him]. He then arose and ran away and came to Bavel [Babylon].

[Source: Avoda Zara, 18a-b]

*** From then on, we have a tradition that when a Jew finds himself, Heaven forbid, in any sort of trouble or crisis, he should give charity, and dedicate it in the memory of Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess. He should then say simply the phrase, 'אלהא דמאיר ענני' - "**Eloka d'Meir aneini**" - three times, which means, "G-d of Meir - answer me!"

<https://www.gruntig.net/2024/06/joey-newcomb-bonim-lamakom.html>

Joey Newcomb - **Bonim Lamakom**

Last winter, I went on a ski trip with Reb Aryeh Weiss and the boys from Waterbury. While we were farbrengening in the mountains of Utah, Reb Aryeh shared a vort that mamish resonated with me deeply. He mentioned the inyan of saying "**Elaka D'Meir Aneini**" to have our tefilos answered. But why invoke Rebbi Meir specifically, rather than any other tzadik?

Reb Aryeh explained that in the Gemara Kiddushin, there's a machlokes involving Rebbi Meir. R' Yehuda holds that the Yidden are only considered children of Hashem when they are behaving like His children, keeping His Torah and fulfilling His mitzvos. However, Rebbi Meir argues that whether a Yid is performing well in their spiritual avoda or not, they are - and always will be - a child of Hashem. L'maisa, the halacha is like Rebbi Meir.

Reb Aryeh pointed out that often, people come before Hashem with a tefilah, but they might not be in the best place in their ruchniyusdik'e journey and feel unworthy of having their tefilos answered. By mentioning Rebbi Meir, who teaches that we are always Hashem's children regardless of our current state, we affirm that a child will always receive a response from his Father, no matter how far he's strayed.

I had my guitar with me and immediately started playing, inspired by this idea. Within a few minutes, we had a song worked out. Later, when I was in Eretz Yisroel, I shared this song with the boys at Yeshivas Beis Dovid (R' Avi Wiesenfeld's yeshiva) during a farbrengen. We sang it for a good ten minutes straight, and R' Wiesenfeld remarked that this song truly encapsulates the essence of his yeshiva.

I asked the boys if they would help me film a music video for the song at Rebbi Meir's kever in Teveria, and Thank You Hashem they agreed.

I hope you enjoy the song, as it represents the special Father-son relationship we're all zoche to have with Hashem.

Bonim Atem Lamakom (Devarim 14:1) - Rebi Meir Omer Bein Kach u'Vein Kach
Atem Kruyim Banim (Kidushin 36a) Elaka D'Meir Aneini (Avodah Zara, 18a)