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**Covenant and Conversation - Vayelech 5765**

**Vayelech**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

At the end of his life, having given the Israelites at G-d's behest 612 commands, Moses is instructed to give them the last; command 613:

Now therefore write down for yourselves this song, and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be my witness within the people of Israel. (Deut. 31: 19)

According to the plain sense of the verse, G-d is speaking to Moses and Joshua and is referring to the song in the following chapter, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; Hear, O earth, the words of My mouth." Oral tradition, however, gave it a different and much wider interpretation, understanding it as a command for every Jew to write - or at least take some part in writing - a Sefer Torah, a scroll of the law:

Said Rabbah: even though our ancestors have left us a scroll of the Torah, it is our religious duty to write one for ourselves, as it is said: "Now therefore write this song, and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel." (Sanhedrin 21b).

The logic of the interpretation seems to be, first, that the phrase "write down for yourselves" could be construed as referring to every Israelite (Ibn Ezra), not just Moses and Joshua. Secondly, the passage goes on to say (31: 24): "Moses finished writing in the book the words of this law from beginning to end." The Talmud (Nedarim 38a) offers a third reason. The verse goes on to say: "that this song may be My witness within the people" - implying the Torah as a whole, not just the song in chapter 32.

There is something poetic about this being the last of the commands. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites: "It is not enough that you have received the Torah from Moses. You must make it new again in every generation." The covenant was not to grow old. It had to be periodically renewed.

So it is to this day, that Torah scrolls are still written as in ancient times, by hand, on parchment, using a quill - as were the Dead Sea Scrolls two thousand years ago. In a religion almost devoid of sacred objects (icons, relics), the Torah scroll is the nearest Judaism comes to endowing a physical entity with sanctity - and this is an understatement. The Torah is less like an object than a person. In its presence we stand as if it were a king. On Simchat Torah we dance with it as if it were a bride. If one is, G-d forbid, damaged or destroyed we bury it as if it were a human; we mourn as if we had lost a relative. Judaism is the story of a love affair between a people and a book, the Book of Books.

What though - if we take the command to refer to the whole Torah and not just one chapter - is the significance of the word "song" [shirah]: "Now therefore write down for yourselves this song"? The word shirah appears five times in this passage. It is clearly a key-word. Why? On this, two nineteenth century scholars offered striking explanations.

Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin) interprets it to mean that the whole Torah should be read as poetry, not prose (the word shirah in Hebrew means both a song and a poem). To be sure, most of the Torah is written in prose, but it has, argues Netziv, two characteristics of poetry. First, it is allusive rather than explicit. It leaves unsaid more than is said. Secondly, like poetry, it hints at deeper reservoirs of meaning, sometimes by the use of an unusual word or sentence construction. Descriptive prose carries its meaning on the

surface. The Torah, like poetry, does not. (Kidmat Davar, preface to Ha'amek Davar, 3).

In this brilliant insight, Netziv anticipates one of the great twentieth century essays on biblical prose, Erich Auerbach's 'Odysseus' Scar'. Auerbach contrasts the narrative style of Genesis with that of Homer. Homer uses dazzlingly detailed descriptions so that each scene is set out pictorially as if bathed in sunlight. By contrast, biblical narrative is spare and understated. In the example Auerbach cites - the story of the binding of Isaac - we do not know what the main characters look like, what they are feeling, what they are wearing, what landscapes they are passing through:

The decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is non-existent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal . . . remains mysterious and "fraught with background".

A completely different aspect is alluded to by R. Yechiel Michal Epstein, author of the halakhic code Arukh ha-Shulchan (Choshen Mishpat, introduction). Epstein points out that the rabbinic literature is full of arguments, about which the sages said: "These and those are the words of the living G-d." This, says Epstein, is one of the reasons the Torah is called "a song" - because a song becomes more beautiful when scored for many voices interwoven in complex harmonies.

I would suggest a third dimension. The 613th command is not simply about the Torah, but about the duty to make the Torah new in each generation. To make the Torah live anew, it is not enough to hand it on cognitively - as mere history and law. It must speak to us affectively, emotionally.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it breaks into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. There is something about melody that intimates a reality beyond our grasp, what William Wordsworth called the "sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns / And the round ocean and the living air." Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.

Music is central to the Judaic experience. We do not pray; we daven, meaning we sing the words we direct toward heaven. Nor do we read the Torah; instead we chant the weekly portion, each word with its own cantillation. Even rabbinical texts are never merely studied; we chant them with the particular sing-song known to all students of Talmud. Each time and text has its specific melodies. The same prayer may be sung to half-a-dozen different tunes depending on whether it is part of the morning, afternoon or evening service, and whether the day is a weekday, a Sabbath, a festival or one of the High Holy Days. There are different cantillations for biblical readings, depending on whether the text comes from the Mosaic books, the prophetic literature, or the Ketuvim, 'the writings.' Music is the map of the Jewish spirit, and each spiritual experience has its own distinctive melodic tonality.

The 613th command - to make the Torah new in every generation - symbolizes the fact that though the Torah was given once, it must be received many times, as each of us, through our study and practice, strives to recapture the pristine voice heard at Mount Sinai. That requires emotion, not just intellect. It means treating Torah not just as words read, but also as a melody sung. The Torah is G-d's libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir, the performers of His choral symphony. And though, when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, as the Israelites did at the Red Sea, because music is the language of the soul, and at the level of the soul Jews enter the unity of the Divine which transcends the oppositions of lower worlds. The Torah is G-d's song, and we collectively are its singers.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Thu, Sep 17, 2015 at 6:05 PM subject: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeilech**

A pasuk in Parshas Vayeilech teaches, "For I will bring them to the Land that I swore to their forefathers, which flows with milk and honey, but they will eat, be sated, and grow fat, and turn to gods of others and serve them; and they will anger Me and annul My covenant." [Devorim 31:20] The Torah thus prophesizes a reality that indeed took place: Klal Yisrael, in the Land of Israel, turned away from the Master of the Universe.

The Torah then warns: "It shall be that when many evils and distresses come upon them, this song shall speak up before them as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring for I know its inclinations, what they do today, before I bring them to the Land that I have sworn." [Devorim 31:21]. The Torah implicitly testifies that the Torah itself will never be forgotten from the descendants of the Jewish people.

I read a story recently about the Ponevezher Rav, Rav Shlomo Yosef Kahaneman. When Rav Kahaneman founded the Ponevitch Yeshiva in Bnei Brak in in the early 1940s, everyone thought he was crazy. War had begun in Europe. Rommel and the Africa core were just a few hundred miles away to the south, with plans to capture Palestine. Everyone thought that the man was a lunatic. The reason he was able to afford to buy the property on which he built the Yeshiva was because it was literally a fire sale. Everyone expected Rommel to march through Egypt and into Eretz Yisrael. However, the Ponevezher Rav proved that he was a man of vision.

Sometime after the war, a bedraggled yeshiva bochur from Europe, who survived the concentration camps and made his way to Eretz Yisrael, walked into the Ponevitch Yeshiva and asked to meet the Rosh Yeshiva. He told the Ponevezher Rav his story and asked to learn in the Yeshiva. Rav Kahaneman asked him: "Do you remember anything from what you learned in Europe before the war?" The bochur thought for a while and then replied that he remembered a Gemara he learned in the third chapter of Maseches Chullin. He proceeded to recite what he recalled from Perek Elu Treifos. The intent of the Ponevezher Rav was not to give the young man an entrance exam. He was looking for something else.

When the student told over the Gemara to the Ponevezher Rav, the Rosh Yeshiva kissed him and immediately told him that he was accepted into the Yeshiva. The Ponevezher Rav took the young man by the arm and started running with him through the streets of Bnei Brak. When they would meet people, he would tell them "This bochur remembers the Gemara in Elu Treifos!" He finally brought the student into the home of the Chazon Ish (Rav Avraham Yishaya Karelitz). Again, Rav Kahaneman told the Chazon Ish, "This young man went through the war and he remembers the Gemara in Elu Treifos!" The Chazon Ish arose from his chair and said "This young man is a living witness to the truth of the promise in the pasuk in Parshas Vayeilech: 'For it (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouths of its children'".

The pasuk says, "Even when you will confront massive evil events and troubles". Despite his experiences, this student still remembers some Gemara. Even if it is only one piece of Gemara, we are witnessing a fulfillment of the promise "It shall not be forgotten from the mouths of their offspring." [Devorim 31:21]

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Bechira Chofshis

**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**  
**Bechira Chofshis**

The Gemara (Pesachim 54a) tells us that the ability of man to do teshuva was one of the seven things that Hashem instituted before He created the world. The whole purpose of the entire creation was to create man to serve Him. Man's service only has meaning if man has bechira chofshis, so man had to be created with the ability to choose to sin.

This is assumed to be the meaning of the passuk that says man that was created "b'tzelem Elokim" - he was created with total freedom of choice. Just as there is nothing forcing G-d to choose one thing or another, so too man is completely free his decision making.

The Torah (Breishis 2:7) tells us that Hashem took sand from "ha'adama - the earth" to form man. Rashi in his commentary quotes the understanding of the medrash that the word "adama" is an allusion to the earth of the altar in the Beis Hamikdash. Man has built into his being the ability to do teshuva. Freedom to choose which path to proceed on is essential to the make-up of man. Even after having made his initial choice, man has the ability to totally undo a decision, in either direction (for the good or for the bad), and choose a totally different route.

In the weekday shmoneh esreh the first request we make in the middle section (containing all of our bakashos) is for intelligence and wisdom, i.e. that we should be able to function as normal human beings. What distinguishes the humans from the animals is our sechel. The very next request in the shmoneh esreh is that we should be able to exercise our ability to do teshuva. This too is integral to the human condition. All people are prone to sin, but Hashem built into all of us the ability to do teshuva.

The medrash (Breishis Rabba 3-9) says that Hashem originally created other worlds and destroyed them, until he finally created this world that we are familiar with. Certainly if Hashem had willed a beautiful and wonderful world in the first place, that would have come about, so why did He initially will several imperfect worlds into existence just to destroy them and then start all over again? Apparently Hashem wanted to teach man the lesson of "starting all over" (see Nefesh Harav page 68.)

Some have the attitude that by sinning and going against the wishes of Hashem they are exercising their bechira chofshis to the greatest degree! From a perverted perspective this is certainly correct. But also included in the concept of tzelem Elokim is using this power of bechira for a creative, positive, and productive purpose. Hashem chose freely to create an entire universe, so we should emulate His ways by using our bechira chofshis for positive purposes - "u'bacharta ba'chaim" (Devarim 30:19) - to choose to go b'derech Hashem. Even after having already made an improper choice, we must use our bechira chofshis to scrap "our world" and "start all over again", just as He did.

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Parshas Vayeilech

**A Royal Reward**  
**by Rabbi Yosef Levinson**

Every seven years, following the Shemitta year, the Torah commands us to gather for the mitzva of Hakheil. At the beginning of the eighth year, on the first day of Chol Hamoed Succos, the entire Jewish nation, men, women and children, gathered in the Beis Hamikdash to hear the king read the Torah (Devarim 31:10-14; Sota 41a). This huge gathering, for the sake of

the Torah, has a profound impact on all present. There was something indescribable at the Siyum Hashas of the Daf Yomi a few years ago; the sense that everyone had united in order to honour the Torah. One was almost certain that everyone who left this assembly would surely rededicate himself to limud Hatorah (study of Torah). Here, one could sense, if only slightly, what Hakheil was like (Adapted from Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzva 612).

Chazal state: "The men come to learn and the women come to listen. Why do the little children come? To reward those who bring them (Chagiga 3a)." Chazal understand that even infants were brought to the Hakheil ceremony (Ramban Devarim; Maharsha, Chagiga ibid) Therefore they ask, since they are too young to learn, what is the purpose of bringing them? The commentators ask - what did they mean when they said that the infants are brought to reward those who bring them? If the children derive a benefit from coming, then that would be reason enough to bring them. On the other hand, if there were really no advantage, would the Torah command us to bring them just to receive reward? Are we being rewarded for burdening ourselves by taking along extra "baggage"?

The Ksav V'hakabbala explains that since everyone was required to attend Hakheil, there was no one to babysit the children. Consequently, parents would be forced to bring their children in any case. Thus the question of the braissa: Why did the Torah have to mention the children given that their parents had no choice but to bring them to Hakheil? The Gemara answers: even though we would have brought them in any case, Hashem commanded us to bring them, in order to be able to reward us for doing so.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz zt'l, the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva in pre-war Poland, gives a different answer. He explains that even though they are only infants, they are still influenced by hearing the words of the Torah. We find that R' Yehoshua Ben Chanania's mother used to bring his cradle to the Beis Medrash in order that he should absorb the words of Torah (Yeushalmi Yevamos 1:6). This was intended to influence him and indeed it did prove to have a profound impact on his future rise to greatness (Avos 2:8. See Meshech Chachma, Devarim ibid). Even though this is why the children were brought to the Hakheil ceremony, Chazal declare that the purpose was to reward those who brought them. One might think that if one tries to influence his children or students, and is unsuccessful, he has not accomplished anything. R' Yerucham writes that our task is to try to bring them closer to Hashem, and regardless of the outcome we still receive a reward. We have fulfilled Hashem's mission and we are rewarded for our efforts. This should be a great source of encouragement for parents, teachers and those involved in outreach. Our efforts are not in vain. If Hashem rewards us, then He must be pleased with us (Da'as Torah, Devarim ibid).

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner zt'l offers another explanation based on the following Rambam. The Rambam writes "Everyone [even those who do not understand lashon kodesh] must prepare themselves to concentrate and to listen to the Torah reading in awe and fear, and rejoice with trembling like the day the Torah was given at Har Sinai. Even the great scholars who knew the entire Torah were obligated to listen with intense concentration so that it should be perceived as if they were being commanded at that moment and were hearing the Torah directly from Hashem, for the king is Hashem's shaliach (agent) who makes the word of G-d heard (Hilchos Chagiga 3:5,6)." Rav Hutner comments that the Rambam clearly understands that the Hakheil ceremony is a re-enactment of Kabbalas HaTorah at Har Sinai. We therefore try to duplicate the awe and fear that was present then. He continues, that we can now understand the importance of bringing the infants. When we received the Torah, the entire nation was present, including all infants. Even if there is no benefit to the infant, we are recreating the atmosphere that was present then by their inclusion. This makes for a rewarding experience and is an integral part of the mitzva (Pachad Yitzchak, Igaros, letter 85).

May we witness the coming of Mashiach when we will all gather in the Beis Hamikdash to fulfill this important mitzva. May it be speedily in our

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**Hamaayan - Parshas Vayeilech**

Parshas Vayeilech

Does Your Prayer Have Legs? BS"D Volume 29, No. 47 6 Tishrei 5776  
September 19, 2015 Sponsored by Aaron and Rona Lerner in memory of  
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Today's Learning: Nach: Divrei Ha'yamim II 7-8 Mishnah: Taharot 3:2-3  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nazir 28 Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 664:10-665:1

Our parashah opens: "Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel." Where was Moshe "going"? R' Mordechai Twersky z"l (1798-1837; the Maggid of Chernobyl) explains: We read (Bemidbar 14:17), "And now, may the strength of my Lord be magnified, as You have spoken, saying." This alludes to the teaching of Kabbalists that when a person speaks, i.e., prays, he magnifies the Name of G-d and has the ability to elevate the souls of many Jews. How does a person know if he is praying properly? The verse concludes, "You have spoken, saying"--if, after a person prays, he wants to "say," i.e., pray more, then he knows that he has prayed well. But, if he is glad to be finished, he has not prayed properly. We also read (Kohélet 4:17), "Guard your legs when you go to the house of Elokim." Proper prayer stands on two legs, says R' Twersky. One leg is man's belief in the holiness of the prayers, and the other is man's trust that Hashem accepts the prayers of even the least articulate person. However, a person must always be truthful, as Chazal say that "falsehood has no legs." [As written in the Torah, the letters of the word "sheker" / "falsehood" all come to a point on the bottom. They "have no legs" and cannot stand.]

Moshe's prayers undoubtedly stood on strong "legs"; therefore, he was able to elevate the souls of the Jewish people. It was on those "legs" that our verse says he "went." (Likkutei Torah)

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"My anger will flare up against [the nation] on that day and I will forsake them; and I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey, and many evils and distresses will encounter [the nation]. It will say on that day, 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?' But conceal, I will conceal My face on that day because of all the evil that [Yisrael] did, for it had turned to the gods of others." (31:17-18) R' Menachem Mendel Krochmal z"l (Poland; 1600-1661) asks: In verse 17, G-d conceals His face once, and this concealment leads to "many evils and distresses," yet in verse 18, where He conceals His face doubly, no evils follow! Why? He explains: The Gemara (Megillah 12a) asks, "Why did the Jews of Haman's generation deserve to be destroyed?" The Gemara answers, "Because they had bowed down to Nevuchadnezar's statue." (See Daniel ch.3.) The Gemara asks further, "Then why were they not wiped out?" and it answers, "Just as they bowed down only for show, not with idolatrous intent, so G-d's decree that they be destroyed was only for show." We see, writes R' Krochmal, that G-d sometimes hides His face "for show," but nothing bad happens as a result. Sometimes, when G-d hides Himself, it leads to great pain and suffering, while other times He hides Himself only so that we will search for Him. The Gemara states that verse 18 contains an allusion to Queen Esther, whose name means "concealment." This is not merely a play on words, R' Krochmal notes. Rather, as we have just seen, our verse alludes to the way in which G-d concealed Himself in Esther's time – just for show, just so we would search for Him. (Pi Tzaddik: Drush 48)

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"But, conceal I will conceal My face on that day because of all the evil that [Yisrael] did, for it had turned to the gods of others." (31:18) R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810) teaches: There are two levels of hester panim / concealment of G-d's "face". When G-d merely hides Himself, it is difficult

to find Him, but it is possible if one looks hard enough. And, since one knows that G-d is hidden, one can motivate himself to seek Him. Sometimes, however, G-d conceals the fact that He is concealed. This is a greater tragedy because, when we don't realize that He is concealed, we are not motivated to search for Him. (Likutei Moharan I 56:3)

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"So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael." (31:19) R' David Hakochavi z"l (Provence; 13-14th centuries) writes: The received tradition teaches that this verse commands each person to write a Sefer Torah for himself. The purpose of this mitzvah is clear – the Torah is the necessary tool in order for a person to perfect himself, and, surely, no craftsman would attempt to practice his craft without his tools. Chazal state that each person must write his own Sefer Torah, even if he inherited one from his father. The reason, explains R' Hakochavi, is that it is human nature to value more that which one has made by himself. (Sefer Ha'battim: Migdal David, Sefer Mitzvah No.16)

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"This song shall speak up before it as a witness. . ." (31:21) "This song" refers to the song of "Ha'azinu" in the next parashah. To what does it testify?

R' Chaim of Friedberg z"l (16th century, brother of the Maharal of Prague) explains that there are many prophecies that do not have happy endings. Most notably, the horrible curses which were read last week in Parashat Ki Tavo end without any mention of a brighter future. Not so the song of "Ha'azinu," which ends with the verse, "He will bring retribution upon His foes, and He will appease His land and His people." This is a promise of the long-awaited redemption. Says our verse: write the song of "Ha'azinu" as a testimony and reminder to yourselves that the redemption will come. Why do so many prophecies end without consolation? Why do many chapters of the Prophets leave us with unanswered questions about our faith? R' Chaim explains that this was done intentionally so that we should not think that the prophets served G-d only because they understood His ways. No, they too had unanswered questions, but this did not diminish their love for Hashem or their service of Him. (Sefer Geulah Vi'shuah ch.6)

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"When Moshe finished writing the words of this Torah onto a book, until their conclusion, Moshe commanded the levi'im, the bearers of the Ark of the covenant, saying, 'Take this book of the Torah and place it at the side of the Ark of the covenant of Hashem, and it shall be there for you as a witness.'" (31:24-26) Our Sages relate that Moshe wrote 13 Torah scrolls on the last day of his life, one for each tribe and one which he gave to the levi'im (see our verse). The reason one Sefer Torah was placed at the side of the Ark was so that if, at some future date, someone tried to falsify the words of the Torah, a master copy would be available with which to rebut the falsifier. This Torah was entrusted to the levi'im, for they are the keepers of the tradition, as it is written about them (Devarim 33:10), "They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisrael."

R' David Lifschutz z"l (the "Suvalker Rav"; rosh yeshiva in Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, New York; died 1993) explains further: It is human nature that one who no longer wishes to observe the Torah's laws will not simply abandon them; he will create a new religion or a new philosophy which he will claim is the Torah. [Thus, those who made the Golden Calf declared, "This is your god, Yisrael."] Moshe was afraid that someone would take out his Sefer Torah and, for example, erase the words "Do not" from the commandment "Do not murder" or "Do not steal." As long as the Torah remains untouched, one or two generations may stray, but their descendants will return. Once the Torah is tampered with, however, all is lost. (Tehilah Le'David p.18)

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Is the Shemittah Over? With the arrival of Rosh Hashanah this past Sunday evening, the shemittah year ended. Nevertheless, the laws of shemittah will continue to affect the diets of Jews in Eretz Yisrael for several more months. First, produce of the seventh year is subject to kedushat

shevi'it / sanctity of the seventh year. Such produce may be eaten by humans or used for certain other limited purposes. It may not be sold, except in small quantities, and the money obtained for its sale has kedushat shevi'it as well. Any produce or money that had kedushat shevi'it during the seventh year remains subject to kedushat shevi'it after the seventh year and the same limitations on its use apply. Second, each species of produce of the shemittah year is subject to biur (literally, "destruction") when that species is no longer available in the wild. This mitzvah does not actually require destroying the produce; it is sufficient to declare it hefker / ownerless, just as one may do at "biur chametz" according to the letter of the law. For most common species, the time for biur occurs in the year after shemittah, not during the shemittah itself. For some species, the time for biur is as late as next summer. Third, if one plowed his field or fertilized it during the seventh year so that it would be fit for planting in the post-shemittah year, he is penalized and may not plant the field in the post-shemittah year. One may not rent the field from him in order to plant it; rather it must lie fallow. However, if he died, his son may plant it. In contrast, if one removed the thorns from his field in the seventh year to prepare it for the post-shemittah year, or he removed stones from it, even though one is not allowed to do this, he is not penalized and he may plant it in the post-shemittah year. The former person performed actual farm work--therefore he is penalized--while the latter did not do farm work, per se.

Finally, our Sages instituted a rabbinic prohibition on eating certain produce--called "sefichin"-- that grew in the wild during the shemittah year. This was done to discourage farmers from planting secretly and claiming the produce had grown on its own. Sefichin remain prohibited until enough time has passed in the post-shemittah year for that species to have grown. If one is in doubt whether the produce before him is sefichin of the seventh year or is new growth of the post-shemittah year, then he may be lenient after Chanukah but must be stringent before Chanukah. (Sources: Rambam; Sefer Ha'shemittah; Shemittah 5768: A Practical Guide)

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-1819.html>

Home Weekly Parsha **Rabbi Berel Wein's Weekly Blog**  
VAYELECH – SHUVA

The name of this week's Torah reading is taken from the first word of the parsha itself – vayelech. This word signifies movement, the action of going somewhere. The subject of this verb is a great teacher and leader Moshe. According to Jewish tradition and the words of the great commentators to the Torah, this parsha was recorded for us by Moshe on the last day of his presence on earth.

It is truly wondrous that on his last day on earth Moshe should be described as being in motion, going in strength and fortitude to further teach and guide his beloved people Israel. Perhaps in this word vayelech alone we discover the secret of the greatness and manifold achievements of Moshe during his lifetime.

Moshe was always going, always engaged in teaching and counseling Israel. We do not find in the Torah that Moshe ever rested from his mission or stopped working and striving towards his goal of raising the Jewish people to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Moshe, so to speak is in perpetual motion, always advancing, going, cajoling and instructing the people of Israel.

The Torah records for us that at the end of his life his physical strength and faculties were in no way diminished. That certainly was an exceptional and most unique blessing. But that was a gift from God, as health and longevity always are. The continued activity on behalf of Torah and the Jewish people was a gift from Moshe to Moshe. It was entirely dependent upon his attitude, commitment and vision for himself and his people. Therefore he is truly described in this week's Torah reading as being a person who is on the move, constantly going towards greater heights and more meaningful accomplishments.

This is also one of the messages that Shabbat Shuva teaches us. In order to return to God and to begin anew in our quest for holiness and sanctity, we must be proactive in our behavior and attitude. Being passive or apathetic certainly will not accomplish the goal of national and personal return to greatness and holiness.

The new year dawning upon us, with all of its blessings also brings with it all of its challenges as well. The ability to face up to those challenges, to keep on walking so to speak, will truly be the measure of our accomplishments and the events of this new year. Moshe has taught us by personal example that it is never too late in life to keep on walking and attempting to fulfill our hopes, aspirations and visions.

Life is precious and fleeting and should be exploited to the fullest. Being in motion, physically and spiritually, is really the secret of successful longevity and lifetime achievement. Even the great Moshe is not granted physical immortality nor will he even be granted all of the wishes he had for himself on this earth. Yet, until his very last breath, Moshe devotes himself to accomplishing his goals and to leading the Jewish people. This short parsha, which should serve as an inspiration to all of us, should be well studied. Shabbat shalom Gmar chatima tova

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: peninim@shemayisrael.com date: Thu, Sep 17, 2015 at 7:34 PM subject: **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Vayeilech**

PARASHAS VAYEILECH Moshe went... He said to them, "I am a hundred and twenty years old today." (31,1) Parashas Vayeilech invariably falls before Yom Kippur. The parsha begins with Moshe Rabbeinu reflecting on his life, in preparation for taking leave of his nation. This perspective gives each and every one of us something to think about. Even the quintessential leader of the Jewish People prepared to meet his Maker. The confluence of the Parsha and the time of year gives us food for thought. I recently came across a lecture from Horav YOSHIAHU YOSEF PINTO, Shlita, which adds compelling insight and even trepidation to the thoughts ruminating through our minds at this time of year.

Moshe prayed fervently that he be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. The gates, however, were closed. Hashem was not going to rescind His decree. Rav Pinto observes that, when Moshe saw that his prayers had not achieved his desired efficacy, he asked Hashem immediately to have whatever allotted time he still had left in this world transferred to his disciple, Yehoshua. Let him have the extra time. This is an incredible statement. Apparently, Moshe felt that the last request he had of Hashem was to fulfill his dream of entering the Holy Land. If this was not acceptable, then he might as well transfer whatever time he had left to Yehoshua. He would put it to good use. Does one cavalierly give away his allotted time on this world? True, Yehoshua was Moshe's greatest disciple, but what about Moshe? Surely, he could have achieved more in the time that he had left remaining to him.

Rav Pinto cites the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah in which we mention that the sifrei chaim and sifrei meisim are open on this day. We can understand the significance of the Book of the Living being open and entries made into the book. What is gained by having the Book of the Dead open? Whoever has passed on is gone. Dead is dead. We have no second chances. We must say, explains Rav Pinto, that this is consistent with the Midrash Koheles which states that, at birth, it is decreed how long a person is destined to live. If he is worthy, he will complete his Heavenly allotted lifespan. If not - if he is doing poorly on this world - his lifespan will be shortened. This is the position held by Rabbi Akiva. The Chachamim disagree, saying that if he is worthy - years will be added to his lifespan. If he is unworthy - his lifespan will be decreased. In other words, Rabbi Akiva and the Chachamim are in dispute concerning whether he who is worthy will live longer than his allotted lifespan.

Hashem gives every person a certain amount of time to spend in the world. If he is unworthy, his lifespan is cut short, and the years that have been

subtracted are transferred to another Jew who is worthy, but originally had not been assigned a long lifespan. Thus, the Book of the Dead is also opened, so that the righteous person whose time is up is to be "written off," has the opportunity to accumulate some of the extra years that another Jew who has proven to be unworthy has lost. Therefore, we ask Hashem, Zochreinu l'chaim, v'kosveinu b'sefer ha'chaim. "Remember us for life; inscribe us for life." We ask that the years allotted to us remain with us-- and not be reassigned to anyone else.

Why did Kalev ben Yefuneh and Yehoshua bin Nun live long lives? When Hashem decreed to cut the lives of the other ten spies short, He took their lost years and supplemented the lives of Yehoshua and Kalev.

Likewise, Moshe Rabbeinu saw that Hashem did not rescind the decree against him. He was not going to enter Eretz Yisrael. He asked that whatever time he had left be transferred to Yehoshua, so that Moshe could partner with Yehoshua when the latter entered the Land. Thus, although Moshe himself was not going into the Land, a part of him would enter through the medium of Yehoshua.

At this time of the year, when we are in the midst of supplicating for another year of life, we should be cognitive of the meaning of "life."

And many evils and distresses will encounter it. It will say on that day, "Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?" But I will surely have concealed My face on that day because of all the evil that he did. (31:17,18)

If the People finally came to the realization that the source of their troubles was Hashem's concealing Himself from them, why does Hashem continue the punishment by concealing Himself even more? Why add more punishment if the people already have become aware of the reason for their troubles? The point has been made; now, it is time to move on. Horav Shlomo Teichtal, zl, explains this with a parable. A person had tried for some time to meet with a government official to discuss a zoning variance. It was crucial for his business that the zoning laws be modified so that he would have more room for his business to grow. After repeated calls and a number of delays, he was finally able to obtain an appointment for the following Friday at 12:00 P.M.

The businessman was not going to be late. Knowing how long he had waited for this appointment and acutely aware of certain failure if he were to be late for the meeting, the man left early in the morning, allowing sufficient time for him to arrive at his destination. He was not counting on the traffic or the two accidents that stalled traffic for some time. Finally, at 11:40, he arrived at the government office. Alas, parking was non-existent. He drove around the block twice, checked the "full" signs at all of the parking lots and still had no parking space. It was 11:55. He began to pray, promising Hashem that he would be on time to daven three times daily in shul. He would even recite Tehillim before davening and learn Mishnayot after davening. What more could Hashem want from him? "Please Hashem, help me!" he cried out.

Suddenly, a spot became available, as a person leaving for lunch pulled his car out. It was 11:58. As he was pulling into the parking spot, he looked up and said, "Hashem, thank You, but I was able to work things out. A spot became available, and I will be on time for my appointment." No Mishnayot and no Tehillim. The situation improved "all by itself." Apparently, he had not needed Heavenly intervention.

We have all been there - some more, some less. When the situation appears bleak and we are up against the wall with nowhere to turn, we turn to Hashem. We pray; we cry; we beg; we make all forms of promises, well-meaning and sincere. Suddenly, our problem is resolved; the situation takes a positive turn. We have hope. Our promises disappear. Our tefillos are as dispassionate as always. Our fervor is, at best, tepid. Why? Because the challenge has passed. When they have no imminent adversity, people turn back to themselves - not to Hashem.

What we often fail to realize and acknowledge is that the relief that we experienced was Hashem's way of listening and responding to our prayers. If we stop praying, the problem might return with a passion. V'amar ba'yom ha'hu, "and it will say on that day" - only on that day will he pray. Only on that day will he acknowledge that he is beholden to Hashem. What about the next day - when the scare is over? Will he then forget all of his promises to be good, his many prayers to keep his word to Hashem? Otherwise, Hashem will conceal Himself. The Jews turned to Hashem, but, as soon as the tide changed and life was looking up, they reneged on their promises. They forgot to Whom they had made promises. After all, what difference did it make? The situation had changed. Life was now good. When Hashem sees that our commitment was short-lived, that our promises were made out of necessity, that we no longer care, He will surely conceal Himself. We must always keep our word, maintain our commitments - especially to Hashem.

So now, write this song. (31:19)

The Talmud Megillah 3A relates the conversation that occurred between Yehoshua bin Nun and a Heavenly angel that visited him. The purpose of citing the conversation is to prove that limud haTorah, the study of Torah, is more stringent than sacrificial service: "The angel said to Yehoshua, 'This afternoon, you neglected to offer the Korban Tamid Shel Bein Ha'Arbaim, daily afternoon sacrifice, and now (after dark) you neglected the study of Torah.' (This conversation took place during the battle for Yericho, shortly after Bnei Yisrael entered the Land and performed circumcisions on the men who had not been circumcised in the wilderness. During the stress of entering the Land and performing the circumcisions, Yehoshua had allowed the people to neglect Torah study. During the day, when they were engaged in battle, they were exempt from study. At night, however, when the fighting stopped, they were no longer exempt.) Yehoshua asked the angel, 'For which of these two misdeeds did you come?' The angel replied, 'Atah basi, I have come now,' which implies that he came to rebuke him for the sin that was presently being transgressed, the neglect of Torah study."

Tosfos asks how Chazal derived from the vernacular of the pasuk that the sins were the neglecting of the Korban Tamid and failure to study Torah. They explain that Yehoshua asked, "Halanu atah, Are you with us" (or with our enemies)? The word halanu, according to Tosfos, refers to the lanu of Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, "The Torah which Moshe commanded us." To this the angel responded, "Atah basi, I have come now," which, according to Tosfos, refers to the above pasuk, V'atah kisvu lachem es ha'shirah ha'zos, "So now, write this song," which is a reference to Torah. In his Minchas Asher, Horav Asher Weiss, Shlita, questions why Yehoshua alluded to the pasuk, Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, which clearly relates to Torah study. On the other hand, in his response, the angel alluded to the pasuk, V'atah kisvu lachem es ha'shirah ha'zos, which addresses the mitzvah of kesivas Sefer Torah, writing a Torah scroll. First, they should have alluded to the same pasuk. Second, how is the writing of a Torah scroll, which in the pasuk is referred to as a shirah, song, connected to Torah study?

The Rav offers an insightful explanation, which teaches us an important yesod, principle, concerning the mahus, essential nature, of Torah, thus, suggesting a deeper understanding of the mitzvah of Torah study. The angel understood that during wartime the mitzvah of limud haTorah is suspended. It was a milchemes mitzvah, a holy war, which only they could carry out. While nighttime is not a time of battle, a soldier must rest; otherwise, he will not be able to hold his own during the next day's battle. Furthermore, we have a rule that, osek b'mitzvah patur min ha'mitzvah, one who is actively involved in carrying out one mitzvah is exempt from performing another one. The Jews were not battling a discretionary war. This was kibbush ha'aretz, conquering the Land, which is a mitzvah. Thus, they should have been exempt from Torah study. Why did the angel rebuke Yehoshua?

The angel demanded of Yehoshua to realize that the Torah was not only a mitzvah from which the Jewish soldiers could be exempted. Torah is also a shirah - a song; thus, it has an altogether different character. A song bursts

forth from one's heart; it emerges as a result of unbridled passion that springs forth in a song of praise. It is passion rising to impulse, erupting in an expression of song. Yes, there is Torah: the code of Jewish Law; the blueprint for Jewish life; Hashem's eternal gift to His People. There is also Torah: the song of the heart; the praise which "explodes" from within the Jew; a song which cannot be continued due to its overwhelming and overpowering expression of love for Hashem.

The angel intimated to Yehoshua: The mitzvah of limud ha'Torah might be suspended due to the exigency of war, but how can you contain yourselves? How can your love refrain from the self-expression of Shiras Ha'Torah? When one feels the urge to sing, he must sing! How can a Jew restrain himself from studying Torah?

Hashem assures Klal Yisrael that Torah will never be forgotten, regardless of the adversity and bitter travail which have been our companions throughout our tumultuous history. Torah will always be at our side. I think the fact that the Torah is a shirah, a heartfelt expression of love that bursts forth from us, is the reason that it is always with us. People do not forget a tune. It becomes ingrained in their psyche and remains with them - always: "Then this song shall speak up before it is a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring" (Devarim 31:21).

A Torah scholar was interned in a concentration camp together with his nephew. The young boy had lost everyone. All he had left in this world was his uncle, the talmid chacham, Torah scholar. The uncle and nephew spent their free time studying Talmud Moed Katan together. The uncle knew that his allotted time on this world was rapidly reaching its end. Every day, more of his contemporaries, men who had prematurely aged from the oppression and pain, were of no use to the labor force. When the time came for the uncle to take leave of his precious charge, when he saw death staring him in the face, his last request to his nephew was not to remember him, not to say Kaddish for him; rather, his request was, "My child, promise that, if you survive, you will finish this meseches of Moed Katan."

What thought preoccupied the mind of this kadosh, Jewish martyr, shortly before he died? What ran through his mind amid the misery and privation that enveloped him? That the Talmud should be studied! This was his last wish on earth. Finish the meseches. Torah may not be forgotten. This was not a man gone mad due to the pressure. This was a man who was conveying his most important legacy to his nephew: continue learning. Finish what we started - and continue on to the next meseches. Pass on the "tune" to the next generation. The Torah is our song. It is the secret of our survival.

Perhaps, we can take this idea to the next level. A song implies perfect harmony, with every note fused together to create a flowing score. The Torah is like a symphony in which all the elements, the various instruments of the orchestra, the voices of the choir, the musical score, all join together to create a perfect harmony. While this most certainly is true of the Torah, the one who studies Torah must himself represent shirah. His life-- actions, relationships with Hashem and with his fellow man-- must all reflect a perfect symbiosis, a fusion of Torah, righteousness, chesed, loving kindness, Yiraas Shomayim, fear of Hashem, and middos tovos, positive character traits. These all meld together to make him a ben Torah who, by his very essence, comprises a song of praise to Hashem.

I came across a vignette about Horav Eliyahu Moshe Shisgal, zl, that puts the above thought into perspective. Rav Shisgal was a unique individual who represented the symphony of Torah. He represented everything positive about Torah. Shortly after his untimely petirah, passing, his rebbeztzin received the following letter.

"With tears rolling down my face, I must relate how your late husband saved my family from much pain. Six years ago, your husband visited my store. I cannot remember why he came, I just remember him coming through the door, and it suddenly hit me, 'This is the man I should talk with. He would listen to my problem. He would help me.'

"My son had earlier that week announced that he was getting married - to an Italian girl. The event would take place in a few months; the girl's family

had approved the match. It was a done deal. I could not do a thing. My son was a man, twenty-four years old, independent, with a mind of his own. I was far from Mr. Religious, since I only attended the synagogue twice a year. The Rav agreed to meet with my son in a week's time. He left the store, and I waited every minute of that week's time. Finally, a week passed, and your husband once again visited my store. My son was there waiting. He was doing me a favor. They left together, the Rav and my son, for a walk around the block that took all of fifteen minutes. When they returned, my son said nothing; the Rav said goodbye and that was it. The next morning, my son came over and said to me, 'Dad, if we have such a great man among our people, I cannot marry out of the faith.' The subject was closed. Our family's ordeal had ended.

"So you see, your husband saved many people from heartache. My son went on to marry a nice Jewish girl, and just last week they registered their little girl in an Orthodox day school. We have lost a good public relations man for Judaism. Who can replace him?"

When Torah is more than a book of law, when it is the defining guide, the moral and ethical compass for our lives, it transforms us into a shirah, a song, a perfect harmonious symphony of praise to our Creator. V'rau kol ha'amim ki Shem Hashem nikra alecha, "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that Hashem's Name is proclaimed over you, and they will revere ." (Devarim 28:10) A Jew who is symbiotically connected with the Torah becomes an example for others to emulate.

When Rav Shisgal left the hospital at the end of what was to be his last stay, a nurse called out, "Come everyone! The Rabbi is leaving!" The Rav entered the elevator, with every last nurse trailing behind him. At that moment, one of the nurses exclaimed, "There goes a beautiful man!" Rav Shisgal embodied a synthesis of pure Torah with yiraas Shomayim, mussar, middos tovos and chesed. He reflected the beauty of Yiddishkeit in his entire demeanor.

In memory of a dear friend on the occasion of his yahrtzeit Hachaver Harav Tzvi ben Hachaver R' Moshe z"l niftar 4 Tishrei 5773 Mr. Bjorn Bamberger Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com [http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim\\_shemayisrael.com](http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com)

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from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Thu, Sep 17, 2015 at 7:30 AM subject: Sukkah Schach Review

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#### **Sukkah Schach Review**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: "What are the potential halachic issues encountered with schach mats?"

Question #2: "My aunt, who always takes the family out to eat when she visits, will be in town for Sukkos, and knows that her favorite restaurant has a sukkah for Chol Hamoed. Can we rely on the restaurant's sukkah?"

Answer: This article, which is a revised version of an interview I provided to Mishpacha magazine a few years ago, covers some of the more common halachic issues and problems one finds regarding Sukkos. Although I have edited the original article somewhat, I have left the interview structure. A pdf of the original article can be found on RabbiKaganoff.com

Mishpacha: Rav Kaganoff, I am very appreciative that you have been able to make time for us. Can you mention what types of halachic issues you have noticed concerning the validity of Sukkos?

RYK: The laws of sukkah are very complicated, and a rav should not assume that his members know how to construct a kosher sukkah, unless he himself has been certain to teach them thoroughly. If the rav has not (yet) taught them properly, then one can certainly assume that there will be many issues concerning the sukkah walls and the schach, and, potentially,



questions even where they place the sukkah, since they may build it under trees or overhangs.

How frequent the problems occur will depend on how well a rav has succeeded in educating his membership to the basic requirements of sukkah. There are two obvious ways he can teach them. One is by mentioning aspects of the laws of sukkah whenever he has an opportunity during the weeks before Sukkos – a little bit before his drasha on Shabbos; a little after daily Shacharis and between Mincha and Maariv. Another method is to offer to make "sukkah calls," just like doctors used to make house calls! The message eventually gets through, and I noticed how, with time, my shul members became very sensitized to the main issues.

Mishpacha: Could you point out the most frequent problems you have found and explain why there are concerns?

RYK: Certainly. Let me first introduce the fundamentals of sukkah construction. A sukkah consists of two basic components, its walls and its roof, which we call the schach; and each has very specific halachic requirements. The schach must be of vegetative material that once grew from the earth but is no longer connected to the earth, is not food, and has not been fashioned in a way that halacha considers it a "vessel" or a "utensil." The correct term for these items is that they are mekabeil tumah, susceptible to becoming tamei, should they be in contact with a tamei item. The exact rules defining what qualifies as a utensil are fairly complicated, and it is interesting how much halachic literature is devoted to defining whether such diverse items as arrow shafts, wooden ladders, thread, and straw or reed mats may be used as schach – meaning, are they processed enough to be considered "utensils" for halachic purposes or not. However, a full treatment of this topic is beyond the parameters of this article.

A "Venetian" Sukkah There are many interesting discussions about the use of other common household items for schach. For example, in 1941 a rav asked Rav Moshe Feinstein whether one can use venetian blinds, at that time made of wood slats attached with cloth, as schach. The inquirer wanted to permit their use, since both the slats and the cloth are made from materials that grow from the ground. Rav Moshe demonstrates from the Talmudic sources that although the wood is basically unprocessed, once it has been attached to the cloth, it is halachically considered a utensil and may not be used as schach.

Walking (under) the Plank There are also categories of items that the Torah permitted as kosher schach, but were later prohibited by the Sages because of various concerns. For example, wide wooden planks are not utensils and do not meet all the other requirements for schach and, therefore, should be acceptable. However, the Sages prohibited using them out of concern that someone might mistakenly assume that his regular wood roof would be satisfactory as a cover for his sukkah. Although today it is unusual to make a roof out of wood boards, in early generations these were standard roofing materials.

This developed into a halachic controversy not that long ago: May one use wooden slats or laths for schach? I remember seeing wooden slats used commonly as schach material by respected Torah scholars, whereas other, equally knowledgeable Torah scholars took strong exception to using this as schach, invalidating it because slats are used in construction. (Shu"t Yaskil Avdi Volume VI Orach Chayim #20 analyzes both sides of the question. He also quotes a very interesting reason why people prefer using slats to other types of schach. He contends that it is uncommon for them to be insect infested, whereas other forms of schach often have such a problem.)

Metal in the Schach Many people assume that if one puts any metal into the schach, such as nailing together the schach, the sukkah cannot be used. This is not accurate, although they are correct that one should not use metal to assemble or support the schach, such as by resting the schach on a metal framework. However, the vast majority of halachic authorities conclude that if a sukkah was assembled in a way that its schach is held up by metal, the sukkah may be used. Let me explain.

Supporting the Schach – the Maamid The Gemara discusses whether the schach must be "held up" -- supported by material that could be used for the schach itself. The majority opinion contends that the rules I mentioned above apply only to the schach and not to what supports the schach, which is called the maamid. According to this opinion, one may use any material at all to support schach, and even having your schach rest directly on steel girders is perfectly fine.

There is a minority opinion that contends that the rules of schach material apply, also, to what supports the schach. Following this latter approach, one must be careful not to have the schach supported by metal or, for that matter, any other material that would not be kosher schach.

Usually the halacha follows the majority opinion, and following their view, as long as the schach itself is "kosher," we need not be concerned about what supports the schach. Indeed, most early authorities follow the majority opinion, concluding that there is no halachic problem with supporting the schach with material that would, itself, be invalid schach. Thus, according to them, one could construct a metal framework, rest the schach on it and the sukkah is perfectly kosher. However, there are some early authorities who take the more stringent approach and conclude that one may not support the schach with material that is itself not kosher for schach.

The conclusion of the later halachic authorities is that although we follow the majority opinion and permit the use of a sukkah whose schach is supported by metal or other invalid-for-schach material, one should not construct a sukkah this way. In other words, one should try to construct a sukkah that is kosher according to all opinions, by supporting the schach with material that itself is valid for schach, but a sukkah constructed ignoring this concern is nevertheless kosher.

This has many ramifications. For example, you are invited to someone's house for a meal or Kiddush during Sukkos and discover that their schach is held up by metal or other material that is invalid as schach. Alternatively, you take the family to a recreational area on Chol Hamoed and discover that the sukkah there was erected with the schach held up by a metal frame. You may eat there and enjoy your meal, since the sukkah is kosher, notwithstanding that those in charge should not have assembled the sukkah this way.

The above section elicited the following subsequent inquiry: "It would seem that this halacha applies only regarding the beams that hold up the schach. Meaning, if the metal nails are making sure only that the schach doesn't slip off the beams, metal may be used. However, if the schach would blow away with a ruach metzuyah, a typical wind, then nailing it down would be forbidden according to the opinion that you should not use metal or the like to hold up the schach."

Rabbi Kaganoff responds:

"My answer was somewhat ambiguous, and I thank you for bringing it to my attention. To clarify the matter: the schach should be placed in a way that it is held up and held in place by items which are themselves kosher for schach. If the schach would fall through, or be blown off by a commonly occurring wind, one should not secure it with something that, itself, is not kosher schach. However, if the schach is sufficiently heavy that a common wind would not blow it out of place, but one wants to secure it better so that it does not slip or move, one may secure it even with metal or a different item that is, itself, not kosher schach."

"Threading" the Schach I mentioned before that there are items that meet the Torah's requirements as kosher schach, but were later prohibited by the Sages because of various concerns: The Sages prohibited using combed flax as schach, even though it meets all the Torah requirements -- it grows from the ground and is now disconnected, is not edible and is not a utensil. The early authorities debate why combed flax was banned for schach use, some contending that it was prohibited because it no longer appears like it grew from the ground, whereas others prohibited its use because it is only one step away from spun flax which is mekabeil tumah, as stated in the Torah, and is therefore invalid because of Torah law.



Does this dispute concerning why the Sages banned use of unspun flax have any halachic ramifications? Indeed it does, and this affects the kashrus of some varieties of schach mats. Is cotton or hemp thread kosher for schach use? This will depend on why combed but unspun flax was prohibited. If combed flax was prohibited because it no longer appears like it grew from the ground, then cotton or hemp thread or string would similarly be prohibited. On the other hand, if unspun flax was prohibited because someone may errantly use spun flax as schach, then there is no reason to invalidate the use of cotton, hemp or similar thread as schach. Now, it appears highly impractical that anyone would use thread as schach, but but the question whether thread can be used as schach impacts on whether thread can be used to tie together the schach, a topic that became an interesting issue with the development of "schach mats."

Mishpacha: How so?

Schach Mats Let me mention that I may have been the first rabbi ever to provide a hechsher to schach mats. Before that time, different companies were producing these mats, but none of them had a hechsher, although a few responsa had been written concerning whether these mats were valid schach.

There was a very interesting curiosity with the schach mats. The fellow who met me and asked me for a hechsher was manufacturing and selling prefab sukkahs, complete with the schach. He came to me with his planned design for the schach, and I suggested improvements on the design, so that there would be no halachic issues involved, which he followed. I then provided him with a letter of certification on the mats. At the time, the idea of a hechsher on schach mats was very original, and I received inquiries from many rabbonim.

Mishpacha: What design changes did you make?

RYK: His sukkah design called for large mats made from split pieces of bamboo tied together with string. Assuming that these were to be made in China, I had a halachic concern. In China, bamboo mats are used as mattresses, which might invalidate a mat made there, even if it was intended for transport and sale elsewhere. To avoid this problem, I told him to have the factory weave every six inches a piece of bamboo too thick to lie upon comfortably. This way these mats could never be used for sleeping, even by the Chinese, and their status as kosher schach mats was uncompromised.

I also had him make another design correction. The sample had the mats tied together with nylon thread, which I did not want. The problem is that nylon does not grow from the ground, and it is therefore not kosher schach. Thus, the thread holding the mat together was not kosher schach, and this thread has the status of a maamid, that which "supports" the schach, since the mat would fall into the sukkah if it was not tied together.

There was another potential question about these mats, even if they were tied with cotton or hemp string. As I mentioned above, it appears to be dependent on a dispute among authorities whether these threads are valid for use as schach. If they are not valid, then they should not be used to be "maamid" the schach either, since we rule that one should build a sukkah in a way that it is kosher according to all opinions, including those who invalidate maamid that is not kosher for schach.

However, I permitted him to make the sukkah mats and tie them together with cotton thread. Since some authorities consider these strings to be valid schach, the ruling of the late authorities not to use invalid schach material to support the schach should only apply when the supporting material is certainly invalid.

There is a second reason to permit cotton string to tie the schach mat. Even if we assume that cotton string is invalid for schach, it is invalid only as a rabbinic stringency, and there are early sources who rule that even those who invalidate maamid that is not kosher schach do so only with schach that the Torah prohibited using, not with schach that was prohibited only as a rabbinic prohibition. To explain:

The halachic authorities cite two reasons to invalidate maamid that is not kosher as schach. Rashi states that using an invalid maamid is equivalent to using invalid schach. According to this approach, the Bach contends that the

Torah, itself, invalidated maamid that is not kosher schach. On the other hand, Milchemes Hashem and Ran both state that the use of invalid maamid is only a rabbinic injunction to avoid people erring and using invalid schach. According to the latter approach, one could argue strongly that Chazal only prohibited use of a maamid that would be invalid schach min haTorah, but banning something invalid only midrabbanan would constitute a gezeirah legezeirah, a rabbinic injunction created to avoid violating another rabbinic injunction, something that Chazal are not empowered to do.

Slatted Mats When the first commercially-produced schach mats reached the market in Israel, there was debate among the halachic authorities whether they could be used. These mats were made from thin pieces of wood tied together with nylon or cotton string. For a variety of reasons, the authorities disagreed on whether these mats could be used as schach. Some were concerned that tying wood pieces together might make the entire piece into one big board and invalidate its use as schach, just as the Sages prohibited use of wide boards, out of concern that someone might think that his regular house roof is valid for a sukkah. The majority of authorities were not concerned about this problem, but were very concerned about mats that used nylon strings to hold them together, considering the string as a maamid.

Some authorities were even concerned with the use of schach mats that used cotton or hemp thread or string to tie them together, being more concerned than I had been when I gave a hechsher to the schach mats. They felt that, ideally, one should not manufacture mats with cotton thread since, according to some opinions, this might constitute a maamid that is not valid schach. Others felt that it was perfectly fine to use schach mats tied together with cotton thread.

By the way, some of today's schach mats are produced with a much rougher bamboo that could not possibly be used for roofing material, and they are then tied together with a rough natural twine that should avoid any concerns about the thread.

Must I Fumigate my Schach?

Mishpacha: Talking about schach mats, there has been a large of discussion lately about the problem of insect infestation in schach mats, and people are being given very extensive instructions in how to fumigate their mats.

RYK: There are some contemporary authorities who feel that people should check their schach carefully for insects, whether their schach is brand new or stored from last year. One should note that the Aruch Laneir, in his addenda Tosafos Bikkurim to the end of Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim Chapter 627, advises not to hang flowers from the schach for decorations, out of concern that the flowers are infested with small insects that, indeed, could fall unnoticed into one's food.

Others note that since most people spread beautiful white tablecloths on their tables during Sukkos, they would readily notice if insects had fallen from the schach onto the white cloth.

I will continue this article next week, with a discussion about the manufacture of the sukkah walls.