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OHRNET *Special*

THE FULL HALF OF THE CUP

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

“Why are all these men sitting on the ground and tearfully reading from those books?” This is what a six-year-old asked his father who had taken him to the Kotel on Tisha B’Av.

“You see that wall?” asked the father as he pointed to the Kotel. “Once there were four such walls around the mountain on which stood the Beit Hamikdash. Now only one is left and the Beit Hamikdash is gone. This is why these Jews are mourning and tearfully saying *kinot*.”

“But, Abba, don’t we believe that Mashiach may come any day to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash and the walls around the mountain? One wall is already standing so all he has to do is build the other three!”

Exile is like a half full cup. During the three weeks between the Fast Days of 17 Tammuz, when the walls of Jerusalem were breached by our enemies, and 9 Av when the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, we mourn the empty half of the cup which symbolizes our loss and our exile. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the full half of the cup and reflect on the blessings we enjoy even in our imperfect state.

When I arrived in Israel 49 years ago, Jews had no access to the Kotel. Nor to the Me’arat Hamachpelah in Chevron or Rachel’s Tomb in Beit Lechem. How grateful we must be

to G-d for granting us the opportunity to pray to Him at these holy sites!

And when I would spend time learning in the Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Mir in those days I was surprised to see a relatively small number of single and married students, including the late Rosh Hayeshiva, Rav Nosson Zvi Finkel, *zatzal*. When today I see the thousands who are learning there and constantly hear of the exciting growth of *yeshivot* and *kollelim* in Eretz Yisrael, I see before me the full half of the cup.

When my wife and I purchased our home in a new neighborhood in Jerusalem, we raised some eyebrows because it was so near to the Jordanian border and within range of the Arab artillery situated near the tomb of the Prophet Shmuel. We did experience some anxious hours as shells exploded around us at the outbreak of the Six Day War. But when we today see people flocking to that tomb to pray there and we see the Ramot neighborhood (where some of our children live) that has replaced the Jordanian presence, we see the full half cup.

Seeing the full half is both a consolation and a challenge. We must be thankful for the one Kotel and be aware that it is our responsibility to mourn, pray and improve ourselves in every way until the cup is completely full.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilam’s donkey’s path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilam why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs Bilam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When Bilam arrives,

King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilam attempts to curse and three times blessings issue instead. Balak, seeing that Bilam has failed, sends him home in disgrace.

Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

READY WHEN YOU ARE, MR. DE MILLE!

“...and from there he saw the edge of the people.” (22:39)

Cecil B. De Mille, the Hollywood director who invented the ‘epic’ movie, stood ready to shoot the climax of his latest epic.

No expense had been spared to re-create a mind-boggling authentic depiction of the collapse of an entire city in a massive man-made earthquake that would rival the real thing.

De Mille was taking no chances and he had a then-unheard-of three cameras shooting the convulsions and death-throes of the city.

Everything was set.

He signaled the special effects team. A massive explosion rent the air, followed by another, the ground heaved and surged upward, manipulated by vast unseen hydraulic lifts; specially trained stunt men and women risked their lives, dodging falling Doric pillars and the lunging floors careering skyward.

Buildings were falling in every direction; fires poured out of the carcasses of those that had already fallen.

After the dust had settled, De Mille picked up his bull-horn and roared to the first camera, “Didja get it?”

“Mr. De Mille, I don’t know what happened, I’m so sorry! The film jammed just before we started.”

“Okay, don’t worry, we still have two cameras.”

“Camera two, didja get it?” “Mr. De Mille, right at the beginning, during the first explosion, a stone hit the camera; we didn’t get anything!”

“Never mind, we’ve still got one camera. Camera three, didja get it? Didja get it?”

“...Ready when you are, Mr. De Mille...”

It seems like the Jewish People are like extras waiting to come on the set in this week’s Torah reading.

Had the Torah not told us of the episode of Bilam trying to curse the Jewish People, we would never have known about it.

All the other events that the Torah writes concerning the Jewish People could also be known from tradition, but not this week’s *parsha*. When this week’s *parsha* was taking place, the Jewish People were way out of earshot. You

could only see them somewhere in the distance — from the top of a hill; across a field; in the wilderness. But we never see them close up. They’re like extras in their own movie. Had it not been for the Torah, we would never know what a narrow escape we had. The Jewish People walk through this week’s *parsha* blissfully unaware of the machinations of Balak and Bilam.

At the end of sixth century, the Byzantine Empire completely destroyed the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. Unbeknownst to the Jews of Babylon, the Byzantines then poised themselves to also make Babylon ‘Judenrein’. Before they could implement their plans, however, the Moslem revolt toppled them from power.

Jews played a prominent role in the overthrow of Czarist Russia and in the subsequent Soviet government. Secretly, however in 1953, Josef Stalin tried unsuccessfully to destroy the Jews in what became known as “The Doctors’ Plot.” According to one theory, if the “Doctors’ Plot” had carried on and reached its climax, there would have been a mass expulsion of Soviet Jewry. But these plans died along with Stalin on March 6, 1953.

In the series of Psalms that make up Hallel, there appears the shortest Psalm (117). It speaks of a world in the time of the Mashiach:

“Praise G-d all nations; laud Him all the peoples; for His kindness to us was overwhelming.”

Once, a Russian prince asked Rav Itzaleh of Volozhin why non-Jews will be expected to praise G-d for His kindness to Israel. Rav Itzaleh replied, “The princes of the nations constantly plot our annihilation but our Merciful G-d foils your plans. You keep your plots so secret that we Jews don’t even realize in how many ways you have tried to harm us and in how many ways G-d has saved us. Only you, the nations of the non-Jewish world, truly see the extent of G-d’s kindness to us, and therefore only you can praise Him adequately.

• Source: Based on an idea heard from Rabbi Reuven Subar

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilam die?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilam's donkey?
12. Bilam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that G-d isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the Land. Bilam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that G-d wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilam." G-d is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilam said, "G-d told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me." The same thing happened to Avraham: G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel.
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilam said to G-d, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do *mitzvot*.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "*Shatum ha'ayin*." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or it means "the open eye," which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

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Israel Forever, Love of the Land, TalmuDigest, What's the right thing to do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach

Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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- Which laws apply to a boy or girl from birth
- Which apply to a girl from age three
- At what age can a girl conceive a child
- Status of a nine-year old boy
- Status of vows made by boy or girl a year before adulthood
- The Divine hairdressing of the first woman
- If a boy or girl reaches twelve but lacks the physical signs

- of adulthood
- The stages of feminine development
- The father's rights in regard to his daughter
- When do we declare a woman an *ailonit* and a man a *sariss*
- When do women examine a girl to determine adulthood
- General rules regarding ritual impurity and eligibility to judge or give testimony

SHAMING A SLAVE

There are certain physical features in a woman which indicate that she has reached the stage of being a *na'arah* with all the responsibilities of an adult.

When the Sage Shmuel wished to ascertain whether a female slave of his had reached this stage, he faced a dilemma. Without an examination he could not be sure. But such an examination is a source of embarrassment. Shmuel understood that when the Torah (*Vayikra* 24:15) said in regard to non-Jewish slaves, "You shall work with them forever" it limited a slave owner to working his slave but gave him no right to embarrass a slave.

Shmuel solved the problem by conducting the indispensable examination and then paying her four zuz as compensation for her embarrassment.

Tosefot points out that Shmuel had no legal obligation to make such payment because there is an opinion (*Bava Kama* 67a) that slaves do not suffer shame and there is no need for compensation. Even according to the opinion that there is a need to compensate when shaming a slave, the payment goes to the slave's owner.

Despite these considerations Shmuel was afraid of Heavenly punishment for what he did to a human being and the payment was to avoid such a consequence.

• *Nidah* 47a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"When the *mishna* states that even one who is qualified to judge monetary cases is not qualified to judge capital ones, it is referring to a *mamzer* and a convert."

• Rabbi Yehuda - *Nidah* 49b

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LEND A HAND

From: Harry

*Dear Rabbi,
I'm not the type of person to share my belongings with others, or loan them out, since I'm particular about their staying intact and I don't want them to get ruined. So I'm having problems with the Torah idea of having to loan things in order to help others, and, even more, with the idea that I should somehow intentionally buy things for the purpose of letting others use them. Is this really a requirement, and if so, how can I overcome my natural inclination to keep my things to myself?*

Dear Harry,

It is certainly understandable that you want to preserve the things that are important to you, that you bought for yourself to be able to use and enjoy, and not have to worry whether they'll be returned, and, if so, whether they'll be damaged or broken, or at least not available for you when you want them.

But first you have to ascertain whether that's your real motivation, or perhaps you're fundamentally uncomfortable with helping others.

For example, even if you don't loan out your personal belongings, are you willing to offer your help in other ways? If not, that needs attention. But if you're OK with that, then even before you lend your things, you can lend a helping hand. Work on finding ways to be helpful to others in ways

that don't depend on lending your belongings.

That being said, while you don't have to give out your things to irresponsible people or under circumstances that are likely to cause damage, to normally responsible people in normal circumstances you should be more forthcoming in sharing. Judaism teaches that one's wealth (and therefore one's belongings) comes from G-d. And just as He shares of His with us, we are expected to share that with others. Doing so is almost a condition for His giving.

Yet, there is another possibility for you as well. If there is a certain thing of yours which people tend to need and ask to borrow, and you don't want it to get damaged by loaning it, you could buy another such item specifically for the purpose of lending it, while keeping yours for yourself.

This is the idea of a "gemach", a type of free loaning organization that benefits others by making things or services available to them which they normally don't have. In fact, a "gemach" might loan things that you don't own yourself, or have no use or interest in, but others do. This might include power tools, infant supplies, Shabbat goods or many diverse and various things.

So given your description of yourself, I would suggest finding other ways to help people while also loaning your own things a little more liberally. But perhaps more importantly, I encourage you to start a "gemach" or two or few to benefit others in this way. Usually, the costs of supplying, and even maintaining, a "gemach" can be covered by part of the money a person sets aside as "ma'aser" (a tenth of one's income) or for charity. Sometimes, a minimal fee or voluntary donation is used for upkeep of the "gemach".

ISRAEL Forever

A NATION UNDER SIEGE

The national mourning of three weeks begins this Shabbat, the 17th of Tammuz, when the siege of Jerusalem during the Second Beit Hamikdash began. (The actual fast is postponed till the next day.)

That tragic siege which culminated in the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and a two-millennia exile is something which people who live in Israel can identify with. Although there are no Roman legions outside the walls of Jerusalem, there are other elements that threaten the country. Deadly rockets are still being fired by terrorists in Gaza, Iran continues to develop nuclear weapons and tens of thousands of

African infiltrators besiege certain sections of the country and threaten its citizens.

There are no easy solutions to these problems even when a national unity government tries to find one. As in all such situations throughout history, believing Jews put their faith in G-d and increase the intensity of their prayer, Torah study and charitable deeds.

Viewing this modern siege should hopefully cause more and more Jews in Israel to return to their religious roots and rely only on G-d to preserve Israel forever.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

DO I LOOK DANGEROUS?

Question - Upon entering a supermarket in Jerusalem I am often asked by the guard at the door if I am carrying any weapon and then given a quick once over with his metal detector. With my very Jewish appearance - facial hair and modest garb - I hardly look like a terrorist. Is it right for me to take exception to being suspected of being one?

Answer - The guard is merely following the orders given to him by the people concerned with protecting you and the general public against terrorists who dress up like religious Jews to get by security checks. Is it this sort of uncompro-

mising scrutiny that discourages suicide bombers from attempting to carry out their deadly missions.

Let me share with you what happened to me a couple of years ago in the airport in Detroit. I was informed by the young lady at the check-in counter that I had been randomly selected for a spot check of my hand baggage and person. The fellow who did the checking in a very thorough manner explained to me in a thick Arab accent that he feels a need to protect a Jew like me, "For aren't we cousins after all"?

Is Jerusalem safer than Detroit?

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE BAKER'S MIRACLE

Each passing anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz sparks memories not only of those who died but those who were miraculously saved.

In the European city of Gaborova the Nazis were intent on killing all of its Jewish inhabitants by crowding them all into the local synagogue made of wood and setting fire to it. The soldiers surrounded the building and issued a warning that anyone caught outside of it would be shot on the spot.

Among the Jews in the building was Yoel the Baker who had managed to bake some *challot* for Shabbat before the Nazi roundup began. He was determined to bring those *challot* from his bakery in order to offer his condemned

brothers the bread they needed for their last Shabbat meal. Ignoring the danger to his life, he jumped out of the synagogue and soon returned with a bag of *challot* and an invitation for all to wash and enjoy a Shabbat meal.

Then came the miracle. From out of nowhere came a Nazi officer and ordered the guards surrounding the synagogue to leave the area for an important combat mission. He even refused to allow them to spend a few minutes to set the synagogue on fire.

The self-sacrifice of Yoel the Baker for the sake of Shabbat was seen by all as the merit that brought about this miracle.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

MA'ARAVA - THE WESTERN LAND

The Talmudic Sages were divided between those living in Eretz Yisrael and those in Babylon. When the latter referred to their colleagues in the Holy Land they sometimes used the term "*sham*" (rhymes



with "Tom" and means "there") or *ma'arava*. The latter term means "west" and was a geographical description of Eretz Yisrael being located to the west of Babylon, the Iraq of today.

THE TATTOO TABOO AND PERMANENT MAKE-UP TOO

BY RABBI YEHUDA SPITZ

There is a widespread myth, especially among secular American Jews, that a Jew with a tattoo may not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. This prevalent belief, whose origin possibly lies with Jewish Bubbies wanting to ensure that their grandchildren did not stray too far from the proper path, is truly nothing more than a common misconception with absolutely no basis in Jewish law. Jewish burial is not dependant on whether or not one violated Torah law, and tattooing is no different in this matter than any other Biblical prohibition.

This mistaken belief was personally hammered home to this author several years back, when my study partner, the indefatigable Rabbi Jeff Seidel, requested our hosting several secular youth for a Rosh Hashana meal. One stood out in particular, due both to his gargantuan buff size, as well as his every movement screaming military. This former U.S. soldier, in Jerusalem discovering his roots after returning from a tour of duty in Afghanistan, sported a few tattoos. Our four year-old daughter stared, fascinated at the artwork along his arms, and asked innocently why he had colored on himself. He replied, (as he dipped his *challah* into sugar), that it was a “mistake”, but she shouldn’t worry because he was going to get them taken off since he wanted to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

THE SOURCE

The Torah states, “You shall not etch a tattoo on yourselves, I am G-d”. This prohibition only applies if the individual performs a two-step process: perforating the skin and filling the resulting hole(s) with ink, causing the mark to become (at least semi-) permanent. The Mishna and Gemara clarify that the Torah attached the extra “I am G-d” to this proscription, demonstrating the significance that is inherent in this prohibition, as tattooing is connected to idolatry. The Rambam, Sefer Hachinuch, and Tur explain that this prohibition originated as a Jewish response to idol worship and paganism, as it was common practice for them to tattoo themselves, essentially branding themselves publicly as idolaters, enslaved to whichever god they served. Judaism prohibited tattoos entirely, in order to completely disassociate itself from other religions.

MICRO-PIGMENTATION

Micro-pigmentation, also known as derma-pigmentation or permanent make-up, is a recent development in the world of beauty aids. This process entails a needle depositing colored pigments into the skin’s dermal layer, the layer between the permanent base layer (where full tattoos are done, making them permanent) and the constantly changing outer layer, the epidermis. This procedure, usually done on the lips and around the eyes, giving a “just made-up” look, eliminates the need for tedious daily make-up application, and is semi-permanent, lasting between three to five years. The question becomes, is derma-pigmentation permitted by Torah law, or is it intrinsically just another form of prohibited tattooing?

The answer is based on understanding several nuances in the Biblical prohibition.

WHAT IS WRITING?

The term used by the Torah to refer to tattooing, is “Ketovet ka’ka”, literally “writing incisions”. The fact that the Torah calls tattooing a form of writing leads many Rishonim to infer that the Biblical prohibition expressly refers to writing at least one actual letter. Others do not accept this conjecture, and maintain that all tattooing is prohibited by the Torah. However, all agree any other type of tattoo such as a picture or shape would still be forbidden, at least Rabbinically.

PONDERING PERMANENCE

One of a proper tattoo’s hallmarks is its permanence, with a lifetime guarantee. This is due to ink being injected deep in the subcutaneous dermis, and showing through the epidermis (outer layer of skin). Many Rishonim therefore conclude that the Biblical prohibition specifically refers to a permanent tattoo which will last a lifetime; all other tattoos involving skin piercing would only be prohibited Rabbinically. However, it must be noted that other Rishonim make no mention of such a condition of permanence in the original Biblical prohibition.

continued on page eight

The Tattoo Taboo and Permanent Make-Up Too *continued from page seven*

IDOLATROUS INTENT

Additionally, it is possible that one violates the prohibition of tattooing on a Biblical level only if his intention is for idolatry. As mentioned previously, one of the purposes of this commandment was to noticeably keep the Jews separate from their pagan and idolatrous neighbors. Several authorities, including the Chasam Sofer, surmise that if one would tattoo himself for an entirely different purpose, he would have violated a Rabbinic injunction against tattooing and not the full Biblical one. Yet, other authorities are hesitant to recognize this supposition and maintain that intent is irrelevant; all tattooing is prohibited by the Torah.

MANAGING MICRO-PIGMENTATION

So where does that leave us with micro-pigmentation? It would seem that at the very least it would fall under the Rabbinic prohibition of tattooing, if not the full Biblical one. Yet, dependant on how the Rishonim understood the Biblical prohibition, there are some mitigating factors. First of all, cosmetic tattooing of permanent make-up is not “written” in letters, nor is it actually permanent, instead lasting for several years. Additionally, since there is no idolatrous intent, rather it is being performed in the name of beauty, has led several authorities to permit its use. However, the vast majority of contemporary authorities reject such leniency, with the near unanimous view forbidding such procedures, maintaining that even with such rationales, derma-pigmentation would still, at the very least, fall under the Rabbinic prohibition of tattooing.

Yet, in case of extraordinary circumstances, such as pressing medical need, or preserving human dignity (*Kavod Habriot*) such as scar removal or blemish correction, many contemporary authorities are inclined to permit such procedures, as according to most Rishonim cosmetic tattooing would “merely” violate a Rabbinic injunction, and the Gemara states “one may violate a Rabbinic prohibition to preserve human dignity”. This would be similar to undergoing elective cosmetic corrective surgery, which would be permitted, even though there is a prohibition against inflicting a wound upon oneself. However, the consensus is that “just for the sake of beauty” does not seem to be enough of a reason to allow a halachic dispensation for cosmetic tattooing.

To sum up the Torah perspective on the matter, I quote the words of Rabbi Yonason Wiener in a related interview with the Jerusalem Post, “The ancient Greeks worshipped their bodies and tried to annihilate the small Jewish minority who saw man as more than muscle and flesh. This was a battle of superficiality against spirituality. Tattooing represents the Greek ideal that beauty is skin deep. We won the battle of Chanuka but the war continues to this day. The Jewish religion is more than skin deep!”

The author would like to acknowledge Rabbi Chaim Jachter’s relevant comprehensive article which appears in his recent book “Gray Matter” vol. 3, pp. 67 - 78, which served as the impetus for my interest and research for this article.

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