

Double Issue

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Tzav

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOELACES

"And raise up the ash..." (6:3)

At first sight, some things in Judaism look pretty weird. I remember someone who wasn't religious discovering the halacha that you should tie your left shoelace before your right. He said to me "I find it hard to believe that G-d cares about which shoe I tie up first."

I could have explained to him that we tie the left shoe lace first as a gesture of respect to the leather strap of the tefillin which is worn on the left arm. However, I decided that what was bothering him was something more fundamental.

Those of us who were born in the West have grown up in a world where religion is a weekend activity. The role of the clergy is, at best, to "hatch, match, and dispatch." Religion is compartmentalized, and so too is G-d. The Western mindset is that if there is a G-d, He is limited to making guest appearances on the weekend. Any further intrusion into our lives is considered extremely irksome, as Lord Melbourne remarked in 1898 on hearing a sermon: "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life."

Judaism, however, doesn't see religion as a weekend leisure activity. It is not just one aspect of life. It is life itself.

Judaism views every single activity in life as an opportunity to bring ourselves closer to G-d. What we eat. What we think. What we say. What we do. What we don't do. Nothing in this world is devoid of the potential for spirituality. Nothing is neutral. If the whole purpose of the world is for us to recognize G-d, then everything in this world must be created to that end. The alternative would be that there are vast areas of this world which have no part in G-d's purpose, and that would be accusing the Master of the world of tremendous sloppiness in His creation.

In the above verse, the word for "ash" is *deshen*. *Deshen* can be read as an acronym for "*davar shelo nechshav*" — "something without importance". When the Torah says "And raise up the ash..." it is telling us to take everything, even those things that seem to us like ash, insignificant and without value, and place them next to the Altar. To raise up the little, unthought-of parts of our lives and to use them to serve G-d. For there is nothing in this world which cannot be used to serve Him.

Even the humblest shoelace.

Parshat Shemini continued on page 8

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Tzav

The Torah addresses Aharon and his sons to teach them additional laws relating to their service. The ashes of the *korban olah* — the offering burnt on the altar throughout the night — are to be removed from the area by the *kohen* after he changes his special linen clothing. The *olah* is brought by someone who forgot to perform a positive commandment of the Torah. The *kohen* retains the skin. The fire on the altar must be kept constantly ablaze. The *korban mincha* is a meal offering of flour, oil and spices. A handful is burned on the altar and a *kohen* eats the remainder before it becomes leaven. The Parsha describes the special *korbanot* to be offered by the *Kohen Gadol* each day, and by Aharon's sons and future descendants on the day of their inauguration. The *chatat*, the *korban*

brought after an accidental transgression, is described, as are the laws of slaughtering and sprinkling the blood of the *asham* guilt-*korban*. The details of *shelamim*, various peace *korbanot*, are described, including the prohibition against leaving uneaten until morning the remains of the *todah*, the thanks-*korban*. All sacrifices must be burned after they may no longer be eaten. No sacrifice may be eaten if it was slaughtered with the intention of eating it too late. Once they have become ritually impure, *korbanot* may not be eaten and should be burned. One may not eat a *korban* when he is ritually impure. Blood and *chelev*, forbidden animal fats, are prohibited to be eaten. Aharon and his sons are granted the breast and shank of every *korban shelamim*. The inauguration ceremony for Aharon, his sons, the Mishkan and all of its vessels is detailed.

Parshat Shemini continued on page 8

SURVIVAL FROM ASHES

Tzav (Shabbat Para)

In the long history of our people's battle for survival we have been forced to contend with two categories of threats – external dangers and internal ones. The external ones are the enemies pledged to our destruction who are represented by Amalek whose treacherous attack we recalled last Shabbat in our special Torah reading for *Parshat Zachor*. The internal ones are our spiritual imperfections which are represented by the ritual impurity which is the focus of this Shabbat's special reading – *Parshat Para*.

A major annual event in the life of Jews during the time of the Mishkan and the *Beit Hamikdash* was the offering of the *Korban Pesach* – the Paschal lamb – on the threshold of the Pesach holiday. In order to qualify for offering such an important sacrifice during the day and eating its flesh at night, acts which symbolized a Jew's bond with his G-d and with his peo-

ple, one had to be pure of spiritual contamination. Should one have contracted such contamination through contact with the dead, he could achieve purity only through a seven-day process involving the ashes of the *para aduma* – the red heifer. In recalling this preparation of purification we read the Torah chapter regarding the red heifer a few weeks before Pesach as a reminder of the past need to become pure in time.

This reading should serve as a reminder to us in the present to purify ourselves of the spiritual contaminations which so much of Israeli society has contracted in its effort to emulate the corrupt culture of the non-Jewish world. To achieve this we do not need the ashes of the red heifer but rather a return to the Torah in which we read about them. This is what will achieve for us the spiritual purity which will merit Providential protection for Israel forever.

“WHAT'S NEW?”

Shemini (Shabbat Hachodesh)

A new mitzvah, a new month, and new hope. These are the messages of the special Torah chapter we will read in our synagogues this Shabbat in addition to the regular weekly portion. The fourth and final of the special chapters which characterize the Purim – Pesach season, *Parshat Hachodesh* recalls the first mitzvah commanded to our ancestors while they were still in Egypt.

This command, issued on Rosh Chodesh Nissan 3315 years ago, charged the emerging Jewish nation with the responsibility of maintaining a lunar calendar, with the month of Nissan in which the Exodus took place as the first month. Our Talmudic Sages and future commentaries saw in this mitzvah a Divine equation between the moon and the Jewish People. The most striking dimension of that equation for our times is

the nature of the lunar cycle.

Unlike its big brother, the sun, the moon is not always visible. There are days in the month in which it is completely obscured from our view although it is always in its place in the heavens. After this absence it never fails to reappear. When G-d informed our ancestors that “This new moon shall be yours,” this was a comforting reassurance that, like the moon, we too would have periods, only temporary, of decline and darkness. The terror and economic problems of today, like the persecutions of the past, sometimes create an illusion of total darkness. The mitzvah of sanctifying the new month which we will recall this Shabbat should serve as a reminder that we, like the moon, will reappear again and, like the full moon, illuminate the world with the light of Israel forever.

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THE FOOLISH CLAIM

In the hereafter, states Rabbi Chanina bar Papa, all the nations of the world will stand before G-d in judgment. This is the scene described by the Prophet Yeshayahu (43:9) in which the Creator issues the challenge “Who amongst them has anything to say about *this*” – a reference to the Torah as in “*this* is the Torah which Moshe placed before the Children of Israel” (*Devarim* 4:44).

This is the ultimate moment of truth when G-d reveals to all of mankind that only those who were involved in the study of Torah are deserving of reward. The Romans present the claim that they established marketplaces, built bathhouses and amassed great wealth, all in order to enable Jews to study Torah. The Persians follow with a similar claim that their exploits in building bridges, conquering cities and waging war were for the sake of Jews studying Torah. “Fools,” G-d rebukes them, pointing out that all of their achievements were motivated only by their own desires for wealth, power and pleasure, and not for the sake of Torah study by Jews.

The logic of these nations, and the others who follow with similar claims, can be understood in the light of what Rambam writes in his introduction to his commentary on the Mishna. G-d designed this world in a manner which has many people involved in mundane tasks so that the rare righteous person involved in spiritual matters will have the material things he needs for his existence. Since there is no doubt that Jews were able to study Torah because of the material infrastructure provided by the nations, those nations claim credit as supporting cast. In His rebuke, G-d does not accuse them of lying but rather of being fools for not realizing the role they played was part of G-d’s pattern for providing His chosen people with the support they needed for studying Torah, but reward is due only to one who consciously acted out of a desire to promote Torah study rather than self-aggrandizement.

• Avoda Zara 2b

ACCOMPLICE TO THE CRIME

Should a *nazir* – one who has taken a vow which forbids him to drink wine – ask another Jew to hand him a cup of wine it is prohibited to accommodate him even if the wine belongs to him. One who indeed hands him the wine is guilty of violating the Torah command of “You shall not place a stumbling block in the path of a blind man” (*Vayikra* 19:14).

This interpretation of the passage applies to any situation in which one enables another to commit a sin which he would not be able to without this assistance. In the case of the *nazir*, our Sages point out, this applies to a case in which he cannot reach the wine himself because it is on the other side of a river and he is dependent on someone else on that other side. This is why Rabbi Nossin in the *beraita* uses the term “don’t *hand* it to him” rather than “don’t *give* it to him” to signal that there is a sepa-

ration which must be breached.

If this is a universal rule why did the *gemara* choose the example of a *nazir*?

Tosefot’s explanation is that when a *nazir* asks for wine we must assume that he plans to drink it since it is permissible for every other Jew and that he simply forgot that he was a *nazir*. Should an observant Jew, however, ask another to hand him some non-kosher meat or any other forbidden food there is no reason to assume that he intends eating it, and there is nothing wrong with accommodating him. If the one asking this help is not observant he is considered the “blind man” whom we must refrain from placing a “stumbling block” in his path by helping him sin.

It must be noted that the distinction between helping one who could not otherwise commit the sin and one who could applies only to the Torah prohibition. Our Sages, however, have decreed that we are prohibited from abetting a sinner in any situation, so that we are not guilty of being accomplices.

• Avoda Zara 6b

THE RIGHT KIND OF MILK

The unique relationship between Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, referred to as Rebbie in our *gemara*, and the Roman Emperor Antoninus reached a critical point when this righteous Edomite asked the Jewish leader he so respected whether he would have a place in the World to Come. The Prophet Yechezkel had, after all, foretold the grim fate that awaited the heathen nations in the hereafter, and that in that doom would be found “Edom and its kings and all its princes” (*Yechezkel* 32:29). Rebbie reassured him by pointing out that the term “all” is applied only to the princes and not to the kings because he is the exception to the rule.

Tosefot cites a fascinating Midrash regarding the source of this Roman’s relationship with Rebbie. When Rebbie was born the Romans banned circumcision. When his parents were reported for defying the ban and circumcising him they were ordered to come to the emperor’s palace together with the child. Rebbie’s mother succeeded in switching her child, apparently with the cooperation of the empress, with the baby prince Antoninus. She nursed this uncircumcised prince, and when the time came to appear before the emperor she presented him as her own child. Upon examining this child and finding him uncircumcised he dismissed the charges against the parents and let them go free.

The milk which Antoninus imbibed from the righteous mother of Rebbie had such an impact on him that he eventually studied Torah as a disciple of Rebbie and converted to Judaism. Milk from an impure source, concludes the Midrash, can contaminate (possibly a reference to the refusal of Moshe to be nursed by an Egyptian woman), while milk from a pure source can have a purifying effect.

• Avoda Zara 10b

continued on page 8

PARSHA Q&A ?

Tzav

1. What separated the *kohen*'s skin from the priestly garments?
2. How often were the ashes removed from upon the *mizbe'ach*? How often were they removed from next to the *mizbe'ach*?
3. If someone extinguishes the fire on the *mizbe'ach*, how many Torah violations has he transgressed?
4. The portion of a flour-offering offered on the *mizbe'ach* may not be *chametz*. But is the *kohen*'s portion allowed to be *chametz*?
5. When a *kohen* is inaugurated, what offering must he bring?
6. What three baking processes were used to prepare the *korban* of Aharon and his sons?
7. What is the difference between a *minchat kohen* and a *minchat Yisrael*?
8. When is a *kohen* disqualified from eating from a *chatat*?
9. What is the difference between a copper and earthenware vessel regarding removing absorbed tastes?
10. Can an animal dedicated as an *asham* be replaced with another animal?
11. How does an *asham* differ from all other *korbanot*?
12. Unlike all other *korbanot*, what part of the ram or sheep may be placed on the *mizbe'ach*?
13. What three types of *kohanim* may not eat from the *asham*?
14. In which four instances is a *korban todah* brought?
15. Until when may a *todah* be eaten according to the Torah? Until when according to Rabbinic decree?
16. How does a *korban* become *pigul*?
17. Who may eat from a *shelamim*?
18. What miracle happened at the entrance of the *Ohel Moed*?
19. Other than *Yom Kippur*, what other service requires that the *kohen* separate from his family?
20. What are the 5 categories of *korbanot* listed in this Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Tzav's Questions!

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

1. 6:3 - Nothing.
2. 6:4 -A) Every day. B) Whenever there was a lot.
3. 6:6 - Two.
4. 6:10 - No.
5. 6:13 - A *korban mincha* — A tenth part of an *ephah* of flour.
6. 6:14 - Boiling, baking in an oven and frying in a pan.
7. 6:15 - The *minchat kohen* is burnt completely. Only a handful of the *minchat Yisrael* is burnt, and the remainder is eaten by the *kohanim*.
8. 6:19 - If he is *tamei* (spiritually impure) at the time of the sprinkling of the blood.
9. 6:21 - One can remove an absorbed taste from a copper vessel by scouring and rinsing, whereas such a taste can never be removed from an earthenware vessel.
10. 7:1 - No.
11. 7:3 - It can only be brought from a ram or sheep.
12. 7:3 - The tail.
13. 7:7 - A *t'vul yom* (a *tamei kohen* who immersed in a *mikveh* yet awaits sunset to become *tahor*); A *mechusar kipurim* (a *tamei* person who has gone to the *mikveh* but has yet to bring his required offering); An *onan* (a mourner prior to the burial of the deceased).
14. 7:12 - Upon safe arrival from an ocean voyage; Upon safe arrival from a desert journey; Upon being freed from prison; Upon recovering from illness.
15. 7:15 - a) Until the morning. a) Until midnight.
16. 7:18 - The person slaughters the animal with the intention that it be eaten after the prescribed time.
17. 7:19 - Any uncontaminated person (not only the owner).
18. 8:3 - The entire nation was able to fit in this very small area.
19. 8:34 - The burning of the *parah adumah* (red heifer).
20. *Olah* (6:2); *mincha* (6:7); *chatat* (6:18); *asham* (7:1); *shelamim* (7:11).

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A SPANISH TRIBUTE

Jerusalemites are familiar with the Raoul Wallenberg Square in the center of the capital. It was to be expected that the Jewish State would thus honor the Swedish diplomat credited with saving tens of thousands of Jews from the Holocaust.

But it came as a pleasant surprise to learn that the city coun-

cil of the Spanish city of Monforte unanimously voted to name a street in the town's old Jewish Quarter "Rua de Raoul Wallenberg".

An official street-naming ceremony is scheduled to take place during the next few months.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Shemini

1. What date was "yom hashemini"?
2. Which of Aharon's *korbanot* atoned for the golden calf?
3. What *korbanot* did Aharon offer for the Jewish People?
4. What was unique about the *chatat* offered during the induction of the *Mishkan*?
5. When did Aharon bless the people with the *birkat kohanim*?
6. Why did Moshe go into the *Ohel Mo'ed* with Aharon?
7. Why did Nadav and Avihu die?
8. Aharon quietly accepted his sons' death. What reward did he receive for this?
9. What prohibitions apply to a person who is intoxicated?
10. Name the three *chatat* goat offerings that were sacrificed on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*.
11. Which he-goat *chatat* did Aharon burn completely and why?
12. Why did Moshe direct his harsh words at Aharon's sons?
13. Moshe was upset that Aharon and his sons did not eat the *chatat*. Why?
14. Why did Hashem choose Moshe, Aharon, Elazar, and Itamar as His messengers to tell the Jewish People the laws of *kashrut*?
15. What are the signs of a kosher land animal?
16. How many non-kosher animals display only one sign of *kashrut*? What are they?
17. If a fish sheds its fins and scales when out of the water, is it kosher?
18. Why is a stork called *chasida* in Hebrew?
19. The *chagav* is a kosher insect. Why don't we eat it?
20. What requirements must be met in order for water to maintain its status of purity?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Shemini's Questions!

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

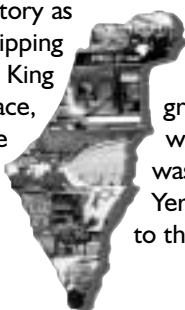
1. 9:1 - First of *Nissan*.
2. 9:2 - The calf offered as a *korban chatat*.
3. 9:3,4 - A he-goat as a *chatat*, a calf and a lamb for an *olah*, an ox and a ram for *shelamim*, and a *mincha*.
4. 9:11 - It's the only example of a *chatat* offered on the courtyard *mizbe'ach* that was burned.
5. 9:22 - When he finished offering the *korbanot*, before descending from the *mizbe'ach*.
6. 9:23 - For one of two reasons: Either to teach Aharon about the service of the incense, or to pray for the *Shechina* to dwell with Israel.
7. 10:2 - Rashi offers two reasons: Either because they gave a halachic ruling in Moshe's presence, or because they entered the *Mishkan* after drinking intoxicating wine.
8. 10:3 - A portion of the Torah was given solely through Aharon.
9. 10:9-11 - He may not give a *halachic* ruling. Also, a *kohen* is forbidden to enter the *Ohel Mo'ed*, approach the *mizbe'ach*, or perform the *avoda*.
10. 10:16 - The goat offerings of the inauguration ceremony, of *Rosh Chodesh*, and of Nachshon ben Aminadav.
11. 10:16 - The *Rosh Chodesh chatat*: Either because it became *tamei*, or because the *kohanim* were forbidden to eat from it while in the state of *aninut* (mourning).
12. 10:16 - Out of respect for Aharon, Moshe directed his anger at his sons and not directly at Aharon.
13. 10:17 - Because only when the *kohanim* eat the *chatat* are the sins of the owners atoned.
14. 11:2 - Because they accepted the deaths of Nadav and Avihu in silence.
15. 11:3 - An animal whose hooves are completely split and who chews its cud.
16. 11:4,5,6,7 - Four: Camel, *shafan*, hare, and pig.
17. 11:12 - Yes.
18. 11:19 - Because it acts with *chesed* (kindness) toward other storks.
19. 11:21 - We have lost the tradition and are not able to identify the kosher *chagav*.
20. 11:36 - It must be connected to the ground (i.e., a spring or a cistern).

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

NEVOT THE YIZRE'ELITE – THE VOICE THAT FAILED

Nevot is known to every student of Biblical history as the tragic victim of the avaricious idol-worshipping King Achav. When Nevot refused to sell to King Achav his vineyard adjoining the royal winter palace, Achav followed the suggestion of his wicked wife Izevel (Jezebel). He framed him on a false charge of blasphemy and had him executed so that he could then appropriate the desired property.



The Midrash states that Nevot was thus punished by Heaven for withholding his beautiful voice from serving G-d. When he would make his regular pilgrimage to Yerushalayim during the Festivals people would gather to hear him sing praises to Heaven. It was after he was negligent and failed to travel once to Yerushalayim and share his talent with those who came to the *Beit Hamikdash* that this tragedy befell him.

Re: Hold That Bus! (Ohrnet Ki Tisa)

Dear Rabbis,

I'm sorry, but I strongly disagree with your answer to the question about holding a bus for someone who is running to catch it.

Everyone who takes buses regularly knows that their schedule isn't precise to the minute (at least not in any city where I have lived, in Israel or the United States). Nobody can predict whether more or fewer people will get on, or how many red lights the bus will have to stop for. Even at the beginning of the route, the driver sometimes takes an extra minute or two to drink his coffee, use the bathroom, or finish his conversation. (Not to mention many other variables.) Anyone who is calculating his schedule to the minute needs not a bus, but a taxi (or maybe a police car with the siren blaring).

On the other hand, people do arrange their schedules on the assumption that they will be able to get a certain bus and not have to wait for the next one. That wait (and for some of the buses I take, it's half an hour) often makes the difference between getting to work on time or being significantly late, making or missing an appointment, picking up a child on time or making him stand outside crying. The fact that a person has to run to make the bus he needs may be because he had to wait for a red light before he could cross the street, or because he couldn't leave work any sooner.

Appealing to the kindness of the driver and the passengers sounds beautiful, but in practice it doesn't work. It's not always possible to make oneself heard quickly enough. And, unfortunately, many passengers and drivers will say no out of grumpiness or selfishness.

I could tell you many stories to prove this. Many times my children have come home from school as much as an hour

late because a driver didn't feel like stopping to let on a large group of school children. I was once on a bus when a driver did that. When I protested, a passenger answered loudly that she didn't want to bother stopping either. I asked her, "Don't you care about our children?" She answered, "No, I don't. I only care about my family." (She wasn't being sarcastic. She meant it!)

I'm sorry, but refusing to wait for someone who is running to catch the bus, in order to *possibly* save a minute or less, is in the same category as buying expensive luxuries while refusing to give *tzedaka* to feed the hungry. Standing on that bottom step and making the bus wait for the hurrying person is exactly what a Jew should do.

• A friend, Ma'aleh Adumim, Israel

Re: Seasons of the Moon (Ohrnet Purim)

Shalom,

The Purim and Amalek e-mail touched many chords in my mind and heart. The poem at the end is deeply moving. I want to share it with my congregation and friends. Please let me know the name of the author so that I can make appropriate attribution. Is it by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair or by someone else?

Thank you for your continuing wonderful teachings. I am now sharing them with my students as someone a few short years ago shared your web site with me. May we walk together on G-d's path, growing in knowledge and wisdom. Have a good Shabbat.

• Tamar D. Earnest, MD

Editor's reply: Yes. The poem titled "Lifting My Eyes?" was indeed written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, and thank you for your words of appreciation. We appreciate them.

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SOUL

From: Jane in LA

Dear Rabbi,

What is the soul?

Dear Jane,

The Torah states that “G-d formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul”. This soul was extremely holy. The Midrash says Adam’s soul was so elevated that the angels mistook him for G-d. In fact, the Talmud metaphorically relates that Adam reached from earth to heaven. Obviously our Sages were not referring to Adam’s physical size, but rather to his tremendous spiritual stature.

The above-mentioned verse hints to different aspects of the soul. Man became a “living soul” (*nefesh*), and G-d “breathed” into him (*ruach*), the “breath of life” (*neshama*). There are two additional dimensions of the soul, *chaya* (life) and *yechida* (oneness). Therefore the Sages taught that “the soul has five names: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama*, *chaya*, and *yechida*.”

Rav Sa’adya Gaon (10th century) takes this statement literally, meaning the soul is one entity with five different names that describe five different attributes. It is called *Nefesh* since it drives the physical desires and needs responsible for growth, as in the verse “when your *nefesh* desires to eat meat”. It is named *Ruach* since it generates emotions, as in the verse “be not hasty in your *ruach* to be angry”. It is called *Neshama* in that it imparts intellect and thought, as in “the

neshama...gives men understanding”. The soul is also named *chaya* since it derives its vitality from G-d, and *yechida* refers to its uniqueness.

The Kabbalists, however, understood that these five names refer to five different levels of the soul which are connected like links in a chain. The highest level (*yechida*) is attached to G-d, and the lowest level (*nefesh*) resides in the blood. The *nefesh*, or “animal soul” common to all living creatures, drives the metabolism and maintains life. *Ruach*, the first level of the “human soul,” generates feelings and personal qualities. The *neshama* pulls man towards G-d, to the performance of good deeds, to be pious and humble and to seek spiritual knowledge and achievement. The levels of *chaya* and *yechida* are far above the human realm, belonging to the esoteric.

The soul’s role as connector between G-d, the purely spiritual, and man’s purely physical body was described by the mystics with the allegory of a glassblower. When the glassblower breathes into the glass, the outermost layer of air impacts the vessel, fixing its form, and comes to rest there (*nefesh* means rest). This outer layer of air is animated by and connected to the wind (*ruach*) that precedes it. In turn, this wind is an extension of the breath (*neshima*) of the glassblower. Finally, the breath is a manifestation of the life (*chaya*) of the glassblower, while *yechida* would correspond to the “Glassblower’s” unique soul.

According to this, it’s not necessarily coincidental” that glassblowing originated in the Middle East!

Sources:

Genesis 2:7; Midrash Rabba, Genesis 8:10 & 14:9; Sanhedrin 38b; Deuteronomy 12:20; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Job 33:8; The Way of G-d, part 3, chapter 1

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE LIMITS OF PRIVACY

Question: I am aware that there is a *cherem* (ban) instituted about a millennium ago by Rabbeinu Gershom against reading someone else’s mail. But I have reason to believe that a neighbor of mine is planning to send a letter whose contents may unjustly harm me. Under such circumstances is it permissible for me to open that letter to see if it poses a danger to me?

Answer: Rabbeinu Gershom also instituted a *cherem* on polygamy and a funny story is connected to these two bans. At a military academy which had some married students living away from home on its campus, a Jewish secretary had instructions to open and screen the letters for reasons of national security. Upon opening one such letter he rushed to share its contents with its recipient.

“Mazal tov,” he excitedly informed him, “Your wife had a boy!”

“Which one of my wives?” he asked.

“You mean to say that you violated the *cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom by taking more than one wife?” was the incredulous response.

“And did you not violate the *cherem* on reading another’s mail?”

From an ethical point of view it is reasonable to assume that the *cherem* against reading another’s mail was never intended to protect the privacy of someone who intends to exploit it in order to unjustly harm another. Legally speaking, writes one of the great halachic authorities, the ban against reading another’s mail is based on the principle that borrowing the property of another without his permission is tantamount to theft. It follows then that just as someone may enter another’s property without his permission in order to recover an item which belongs to him he may also invade the privacy of a letter which may cause him damage.

• Based on a ruling of Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan Community in Bnei Brak

WEEKLY DAFootnotes

THE ORIGINAL OUTREACHER

Our *mesechta Avoda Zara* with its five *perakim* (chapters) pales beside the *mesechta* of the Patriarch Avraham which contained 400! This information relayed by Rabbi Chisda to the Sage Avimi sheds light on an account of Avraham's battle against idol worship found in Rambam (*Laws of Avodat Kochavim* 1:3), and casually mentioned in an earlier part of our own *perak*.

Rambam writes that after Avraham reached the peak of his recognition of his Creator at the age of 40 he began challenging the idolatrous beliefs of the people in his native Ur Kasdim and smashing their idols. When he proved too successful the local ruler tried to kill him but he miraculously survived and fled to Charan where he was able to freely propagate his monotheistic faith. He carried on with his sacred campaign from city to city until he eventually reached the Land of Canaan. His efforts succeeded in attracting tens of thousands in whom he planted his great belief and he wrote "*seforim*" on the subject which he taught to his son Yitzchak.

It is likely that the *seforim* mentioned by Rambam are the 400 *perakim* of Avraham's *Mesechta Avodah Zarah* to which Rabbi Chisda referred. Back on Daf 9a the *gemara* states that

Avraham was 52 years old in the 2000th year after Creation, when he, together with his wife, Sarah, "made souls in Charan" (*Bereishet* 12:5), thus ushering in the two millennia Era of Torah.

Combining the dates mentioned by our *gemara* and Rambam we are left with a need to decipher what took place in the life of Avraham between the age of 40 when he started his career of outreach and 52 when he initiated the Era of Torah, and between the latter age and the age of 75 when he left Charan for the Land of Canaan.

In regard to the first point we may assume that even though Avraham began reaching out at 40 he did not reach the peak of his efforts until 52 when he enjoyed freedom of expression in Charan. A similar approach is found in the commentaries who write that the statement in the *gemara* (*Mesechta Nedarim* 32a) about Avraham recognizing his Creator at the age of three refers to the beginning of his search, but that he reached the climax of the process only at 40.

There is no exact accounting for the 52-75 period but it probably is the time-frame for what Rambam describes as Avraham's campaign from city to city and country to country to spread the word of G-d.

• *Avoda Zara* 14b

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Shemini

On the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Aharon, his sons, and the entire nation bring various *korbanot* (offerings) as commanded by Moshe. Aharon and Moshe bless the nation. G-d allows the Jewish People to sense His Presence after they complete the Mishkan. Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, innovate an offering not commanded by G-d. A fire comes from before G-d and consumes them, stressing the need to perform the commandments only as Moshe directs. Moshe consoles Aharon, who grieves in silence. Moshe directs the *kohanim* as to their behavior during the mourning

period, and warns them that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Mishkan. The Torah lists the two characteristics of a kosher animal: It has split hooves, and it chews, regurgitates, and re-chews its food. The Torah specifies by name those non-kosher animals which have only one of these two signs. A kosher fish has fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden families are permitted. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Details are given of the purification process after coming in contact with ritually-impure species. *Bnei Yisrael* are commanded to be separate and holy — like G-d.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Shemini

PANS AND PLANS

"And the sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each man took his fire-pan." (10:1)

Nadav and Avihu made an error of judgment. They thought it was not only the *Kohen Gadol* who could bring the incense offering in the Holy of Holies, but that even they were permitted to do so.

They were great *tzaddikim* and no doubt pondered their conclusion before committing themselves to action.

The Midrash comments on the above verse that "each man" used his fire-pan; "each man" by himself, without seeking advice

one from the other. The implication here is that if they had taken advice one from the other, if they had talked it over before they acted, that they would not have erred.

But why should they have arrived at a different conclusion? Seeing as they both did the same thing — they both brought the "strange fire" — it must be that they both were of the same opinion, that a non-*Kohen Gadol* was permitted to offer the incense. So even if they had consulted with each other, wouldn't they have still come to the same conclusion?

Such is the power of counsel. That even though two people may share an identical opinion, through discussion and mutual counsel they can arrive at the truth, which may be 180 degrees removed from what they both previously believed.

• Source: *Chidushei HaLev*