

A Taste of Torah

Conserving the Future - and the Past

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Lots of people are very concerned about the need to conserve the Earth's resources. From water to wheat, petroleum to pine trees, they say, we are overtaking the assets our planet provides, and sooner or later we are going to run into serious trouble.

The Torah also has a word to say about the notion of conservation. Take the mitzvah of *shiluach hakan* in this week's parsha. The Torah commands us that when one happens upon a bird's nest that contains eggs or chicks, one must chase away the mother bird before taking them. The Torah informs us that if one fulfills this mitzvah, he will merit a long life.

There is one other mitzvah where the Torah specifies long life as a reward: the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'eim*, honoring one's parents. Why are these two mitzvos selected as a merit for long life? There is much discussion regarding this question, and I'd like to share an insight from the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehuda Loew; c. 1520-1609). The Maharal (Tiferes Yisrael Ch. 61), explains if one were to take both the mother and the eggs or chicks, presumably for the purpose of consuming them (though the mitzvah applies irrespective of one's intentions), that would effectively end the continuity of the line of this particular family of birds. By sparing the mother, she has the opportunity to reproduce, ensuring the preservation of her line. One who is dedicated to true and proper existence of the world merits his own continued existence, and is given a long life.

Honoring one's parents, continues the Maharal, is a recognition not of the *future* of existence, but of the *origins* of existence. One's obligation to honor parents stems from the recognition that he owes his entire existence to his parents.

Once again, this requires a dedication to existence - in this case, to the origins of one's existence. This dedication earns one his own prolonged existence.

The Maharal teaches us that the Torah places great import on devotion to true existence - to have the ability to see the bigger picture, both the needs of the future and the realities of the past - and to live one's life accordingly.

The Talmud (see Kiddushin 30b-31a) teaches that an extension of the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'eim* is the recognition that there are three partners in the creation of a human: the father, the mother, and G-d Himself. When one recognizes and appreciates that he owes his existence to his parents, he will also recognize that he owes his existence to G-d. Thus, part of living one's life in line with true existence is, of course, to recognize the Source of all existence - G-d Himself, Who creates and runs the world at every moment. Were He to withdraw for an instant, all would return to absolute nothingness.

We thus emerge with a new picture of conservation - it is the recognition of, and devotion to, true existence. The Torah, while permitting use of available resources, does tell us to take steps to guard them for the future. But it also gives much weight to recognizing where one comes from. Many in today's world, while trumpeting the need to preserve for future generations, turn their backs on the past, believing that they have progressed past the egregious errors of those who preceded them. But the Torah teaches us that we must also dedicate ourselves to connecting with the origins of our existence - our parents, ancestors, and, ultimately, our Creator - to be locked into true life.

Stories For The Soul

Lashes of Brilliance

Rabbi Meir Yechiel, the Ostrovitzer Rebbe (d. 1928), once met with Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (1863-1940), one of the premier Torah leaders of pre-WWII Europe who was heavily involved in communal matters. Rav Chaim Ozer asked the Rebbe to share a Torah thought with him. The Rebbe demurred, saying, "I should share a Torah thought with *you*? You are a *gavra rabbah* (great man)!"

"And what makes me a great man?" asked Rav Chaim Ozer.

The Rebbe replied by citing a Talmudic passage in Tractate Kiddushin (22b) that states, "Rava said, 'These foolish Babylonians! They stand for a Sefer Torah, but they don't stand for a Torah scholar. For in the (Written) Torah it is written that one (who sinned) receives 40 lashes, and the Rabbis (based on the Oral Tradition and laws of Biblical exegesis) subtracted one (and said that it is actually 39).'"

Why, asked the Rebbe, did the Talmud choose the law of the number of lashes more than any other Torah law that is interpreted differently than the simple meaning by the Rabbis? The answer, he explained, is that this particular law reduces the suffering of another Jew, as it minimizes the number of lashes a sinner can receive. Reducing the pain of another Jew is what makes these Torah scholars such great people.

"I am well aware of how much time and effort you invest in alleviating the suffering of our fellow Jews," said the Rebbe to Rav Chaim Ozer. "And this makes you a *gavra rabbah*!"

Kollel Happenings

A STICKING POINT: THE VACCINATION CONTROVERSY AT SEP. 2ND T4T

What is the Torah's view of vaccination? Is it optional, required, or perhaps frowned upon? Does the fact that others may be negatively affected by non-vaccination play a role? What about forcing individuals to become vaccinated? Join Noah Makovsky, M.D., and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they examine the issues. September 2nd, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

SHOFAR, SO GOOD WITH RABBI MORDECHAI FLEISHER

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a two-part series as he travels inside the shofar. Classes will take place on Mondays August 31 and September 7 at Aish Denver, 9550 E. Bellevue Ave., from 7:45-8:45 pm. For women.

PRUZBUL ON LABOR DAY

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Learning will focus on the cancellation of debts on shmitah and the pruzbul. Four locations: Kollel West Side Bais Medrash, 1516 Xavier St., selichos at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning; Aish Denver, 9550 E. Bellevue Ave., selichos at 7:00 followed by breakfast and learning; EDOS, 198 S. Holly St., selichos at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning; and DAT, 6825 E. Alameda Ave., selichos at 8:00 followed by breakfast and learning.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When do we mention verses of *K'suvim* (Writings) followed by verses from *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and make note of the distinction?

A: In *mussaf* on Rosh Hashana, the three middle blessings have verses from the Torah, followed by verses from *Kesuvim*, then verses from *Nevi'im*, and one final verse from the Torah (see Tractate Rosh

Hashana 32a).

This week's question: On every festival, after reading the Torah portion of the day, there is a centuries-old custom to read the verses of the *mussaf*-offering of the day from a second Torah scroll. Why don't we do this on Shabbos, as well?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org

Ask the Rabbi

Exercise & Your Rights

Yoel wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My parents are frequently asking me to work out. They are very into this new fad of exercising all of the time, but it doesn't appeal to me. I am not out of shape, per se, I just do not lift weights or use our treadmill: They do not interest me. I also think that working out the way they do does not show modesty (by the way, they aren't frum [observant] but I am trying to be). I know that I should fulfill *kibud av v'eim* (honoring one's father and mother), and take care of my body, but I think I am in fine condition and get enough exercise walking around school. My parents aren't "commanding" me to do it, they just advise it to me all the time. What should I do?

Dear Yoel,

One of the big enthusiasts of this "new exercise fad" is Maimonides. Good health, writes Maimonides, is a prerequisite for mitzvah observance. He promises that anyone following his health program - which includes vigorous daily aerobics - will enjoy good health.

So your parents are right. You should exercise.

But even if they're wrong... you should exercise. You see, your parents gave you life. They fed you. They changed your diaper. And even now, look how concerned they are about you! Who else would "nudge" you all the time to exercise!

Although you may be in good physical shape, your attitude towards your parents seems a bit flabby. Honoring parents is not only in the way you act and speak towards your parents. It's also in the way you think about them. Although your parents may be "simple" and "ordinary," but in your eyes they should

be like prestigious dignitaries.

When the Torah says to honor your parents, it's not talking about some Biblical parent who lived in ancient times; it's talking about someone who may be sitting in front of the TV with a beer and a bag of potato chips! That's the person you're supposed to honor!

There's a very important point to realize here. When a child is trying to become observant, it's natural that parents will be extra sensitive to any of his objections. They may perceive such objections as a revolt against them. Therefore, it's especially important that you try to compromise as much as possible (within the guidelines of Halacha - e.g., modesty).

When you listen to your mom and dad, they will see in you a son whose Torah values teach him to respect his parents.

By the way, working out with treadmills and weights isn't supposed to be interesting! (Maybe that's why they're called dumbbells.) Listening to music can make exercise easier. Or try something fun, like racquetball or Frisbee. I'd like to write more, but I've got to run... I have a court reserved for my daily squash game, and I can't keep my partner waiting! (He's also an Ohr Somayach Rabbi! Honest!)

So if 'till now your favorite exercise has been jogging your memory and climbing the walls, maybe it's time to start bending over backwards and jumping on the bandwagon!

Sources:

-Maimonides *Hilchot Dayot* 4

-Chayeh Adam 63:3

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