

A Taste of Torah

Not Making Any Promises

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Undoubtedly, one of the most solemn events on the Jewish calendar is Kol Nidrei. This centuries-old formulation, traditionally sung in an old, haunting melody on the eve of Yom Kippur, definitely occupies an unparalleled place in Judaism. However, upon closer examination, it seems quite puzzling. Its contents are about the “release” of vows and other binding obligations, and there is an old halachic debate whether it is a retroactive cancellation of our vows or a proclamation regarding future vows to that effect. Why is that the “kickoff” of one of the holiest days of the year, and what is the significance of this declaration that has earned Yom Kippur night the title, in many communities, of “Kol Nidrei night?”

In this week’s parsha, we read about vows and the laws that pertain to them. Let us examine some of the laws and statements of our Rabbis, and we may see how this seemingly minor portion contains vital lessons for us. The Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) comments that Moshe related these laws to the leaders of the tribes. This is in contrast with almost all commandments, where Moshe is commanded to teach to all those to whom they are relevant. The Ramban explains that since most of the section deals with the absolution of vows, it would be appropriate to keep these laws from the masses, who may misuse them and treat vows lightly. They definitely exist, but we must stress the severity, not the leniencies, of vows.

Perhaps we can extend this lesson further to all areas of speech. As

Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) says (Proverbs 18:21), “Death and life are in power of the tongue.” Although speech seems innocuous, its effects are most powerful. One aspect are interpersonal issues, such as slander, falsehood, or verbally abusing others, where words can actually bring harm, many times more than sticks and stones. In addition, so much of our connection with Hashem is with words. Praying, learning Torah and saying blessings maintain and grow our spirituality. Through the severity of the vow, we appreciate and value proper speech.

In addition, the Kli Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Luntschitz, d. 1619) explains an interesting saying of our Sages (Nedarim 22a): “One who makes a vow is regarded as having built an (illegitimate) altar.” He notes that in prohibiting sacrifices outside of the Temple, the Torah uses a language also used in our parsha regarding vows. The common denominator is that both are an individual’s wish to stand out, doing something beyond his obligation and beyond the norm. This, says the Kli Yakar, can come from haughtiness, and deserves the special emphasis placed on its awareness.

Using these concepts, we can appreciate the hints given to us through this parsha, as well as the yearly Yom Kippur reminder to these effects. May we all merit to utilize these lessons and improve our relationships with Hashem and our fellow man.

Stories For The Soul

Keeping Clean

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Rabbi Naftali Porush was the driving force behind the construction of Jerusalem’s Sha’arei Chesed neighborhood. Rabbi Porush went to great lengths to ensure that even poor families would be able to purchase homes in the new neighborhood.

One day while in shul, Rabbi Porush overheard two people talking. “Did you hear about Rabbi Porush’s plans to build homes in Shaarei Chesed? “Sure,” the other replied. “It’s a wonderful idea. But you can be sure that Reb Naftali has two of those houses reserved for himself!”

As a result of what he overheard, Rabbi Porush shelved the project for two years. When the project finally resumed, he vowed not to buy even one for the houses for himself, lest anyone suspect him of using his position as a means to pay less than others. He honored this vow for the rest of his life.

Our Sages teach us, based on a verse in this week’s parsha, “And you shall be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael (Bamidbar 32:22),” that one is obligated to make sure his actions are not subject to any suspicion.

Kollel Happenings

SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE FEATURING RABBI MORDECHAI & MRS. CRAINDELL MANNES

The Kollel is proud to announce a scholar-in-residence program featuring Rabbi Mordechai & Mrs. Craindell Mannes of Chicago. For information about classes, one-on-one meetings and other learning opportunities, please contact Rabbi Heyman, rmh@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 11:30 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

THE FAR SIDE OF THE TALMUD

Aggada, the passages of the Talmud that focuses on Jewish thought and outlook, provides keen insights into human nature, and offers advice on how to live our lives, can be difficult to understand, but the knowledge and wisdom hiding beneath the surface is ample reason to make the effort. Be fascinated and inspired as Rabbi Moshe Heyman presents a whole new dimension in Torah learning based on the classic work *Ain Yaakov*. Tuesdays, 1:45-2:45 pm at the Kollel Torah Center, 9550 Bellevue Ave. For more info, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When one is required to bow at certain junctures during the prayers, one is supposed to do so to the extent that the "knots" of the spine protrude from the back. What is a situation where one is supposed to only bow slightly?

A: 1) When one recites kaddish, one bows at certain points (see Orach Chaim 56:4). These bows are not part of the original Rabbinical order of bows during prayer. Since adding new customs is generally frowned upon, one should only bow slightly, so as to distinguish from the

original ordinances (see Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 56:7 and 113:6). 2) During the recitation of *vidui* (confession), one bows slightly.

This week's question: Halacha states that one is required to wash his hands after removing his shoes (Orach Chaim 4:18). Some say this applies even without touching the shoes (Pri Megadim *ibid.*). Can you prove from a practiced custom that touching the shoes is needed to necessitate washing?

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

Ask the Rabbi

Flying Rabbis

C.E.K. from Los Angeles, CA wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Thanks again for your very informative and enjoyable service. I promise you I'm serious about this question, I'm not joking or trying to make fun. I have recently been exposed, through a student film, to a reference about "flying rabbis." Apparently, throughout history this is a well-documented phenomenon. Apparently, the last one died within the past 100 years or so. Could you recommend some easily available (in the US) books on the subject? If this film was merely generating a fictional hoax, I apologize. If not, I eagerly await your scholarship on the matter. Shalom.

Dear C.E.K.,

Jewish tradition does relate incidents of people, both righteous and wicked, who were able to fly. The righteous people did so using holy methods, while the wicked ones resorted to the occult to do so.

There are stories of a particular rabbi who lived in Egypt early this century who, they claim, was able to fly. His name was Rabbi Abuchatzaira. His descendants live in Israel and are a famous family of Kabbalists. There is also a story about the Baal Shem Tov and one of his disciples flying across a river. As with many of these kinds of stories, if you believe all of them you are too gullible, but if you don't believe any you are too cynical.

We are cautioned against telling too many "miracle stories." A person is considered righteous or wicked based on his deeds alone, and so the ability to do miracles doesn't really prove anything.

Regarding Judaism and the occult, I suggest the book *Faith and Folly* by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel.

Sources:

-Yalkut Shimoni Shemos 14:235

-Targum Yonatan Bamidbar 31:8

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