

A Taste of Torah

Mind Your Manners

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

A certain great Torah scholar was once asked whether Jews ought to follow the custom of the man opening the car door for the woman. The Torah giant replied that it depends: If it's a freezing cold day outside, then he should certainly do so, for the car is presumably warmer than the temperature outside, and he should afford her the earliest opportunity to get out of the cold. On the other hand, if it's quite warm outside, the car tends to be much hotter; in that case, the man should first climb in, start the car, turn on the air conditioner, and then allow the lady into the car.

The Torah doesn't care much for etiquette; it does care for the proper conduct in any given situation. To be sure, one must behave like a mensch, be polite and have proper manners, but not at the expense of the correct course of action.

An incident in this week's parsha is a case-in-point. When Moshe appears before Pharaoh to warn him of the impending plague of Death of the Firstborn, he tells Pharaoh that "these servants of yours will come down and bow before me, saying, 'Go out...'" (11:8) In fact, it was Pharaoh himself who frantically searched for Moshe that fateful night, begging him to leave Egypt with the Jewish People, as the firstborn lay dying throughout Egypt.

Why did Moshe not inform Pharaoh of the whole truth? Rashi (ibid.) explains that Moshe had an obligation to show respect for the king, and, as such, it was improper to state that Pharaoh himself would be the one running through the streets in a panic.

Yet at the close of the aforementioned encounter, Moshe is chased from the royal palace by Pharaoh, who warns Moshe not to show his face again. Moshe, before departing, feels that Pharaoh's behavior is quite improper, and slaps him across the face. (Zevachim 102a) So much for respecting the king! How are we to understand Moshe's actions?

The Brisker Rov, Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959), explains that the obligation to show respect and honor to a king is not predicated upon etiquette; if that were the case, it would never be possible for Moshe to commit such a heinous breach of protocol by slapping Pharaoh. Rather, the Torah mandates that a king is entitled to respect – even a king as wicked as Pharaoh. But when Pharaoh stepped over the line and chased Moshe away, he deserved a slap for his actions, royalty notwithstanding. And a slap he got.

Unfortunately, people frequently conduct themselves as the environment around them sees fit. It is incumbent upon us, as G-d's Chosen Nation, to conduct ourselves as the Torah sees fit.

Ask the Rabbi

Shabbos Mail

Josh wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I was told that even in the USA one should not mail letters on Fridays

because he is causing a non-Jew to work for you on Shabbos, which is forbidden. It makes sense to me, but I know a lot of my Orthodox friends mail their letters on Fridays. Are they breaking the (Torah) law?

Stories For The Soul

Against All Odds

While the Jews in Egypt could have feared Egyptian wrath when sacrificing the Egyptian deity (the lamb, as the Korban Pesach), they exhibited true dedication in fulfilling Hashem's will, regardless of the cost.

Jack and Miriam Stein, a young couple in New York, bought a house that had belonged to an elderly woman, whose son had inherited the house. The house was filled with knickknacks and old furniture, but the owner chose to sell it to them 'as is', leaving the mess and repairs to Jack and Miriam.

The new house was not far from their old home, so Miriam had her children play in the new house, while she went back and forth between the two, bringing things over and cleaning up.

One day, Miriam noticed her young daughter wearing a pearl necklace. Upon inquiry, Miriam was told that it had been found in a 'toy box' in the new house. When the little girl showed the toy box to her mother, Miriam discovered that rather than a toy box, the necklace had come from a strong box filled with jewelry and other valuables that totaled a quarter of a million dollars in value.

While family and friends were convinced that the treasure was included in the house 'as is', Jack wanted to rest assured that he was not keeping anything that did not belong to him. He went to ask the advice of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the leading halachic authority of the time.

Rabbi Feinstein ruled that he must return the money, and that is exactly what Jack did. The owner was stunned at Jack's honesty and speechless with gratitude.

There was a bit of irony here because

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Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers for a three-week series delving into the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855



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Interpersonal Issues Returning Lost Objects

If one found an item in a safe, protected place, it is not regarded as a lost item, because it was probably placed there by the owner. It may not be taken, even for the purpose of returning it to the owner.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

Continued from front

Dear Josh,

According to Jewish Law one is allowed to mail a letter on Friday for delivery by a non-Jewish mailman. The reason: Since he is not specifically asked or required to deliver it on Shabbos, you are not asking him to work for you on Shabbos. He would be like any other contracted-worker, with whom it is permitted to do business on Fridays. It's permitted to mail the letter even if the mailman tells you he will deliver it on Shabbos, because it was his choice to deliver it then, and not per your request.

"Special Delivery" or a telegram is a different story. In this case you are requesting delivery on Shabbos, and it

would therefore be forbidden. However, there are ways to send these messages in the case of an emergency ~ in such a case consult your LOR (Local Orthodox Rabbi).

In a future edition of this column I intend to deal with the related topic of sending E-mail that is "delivered" on Shabbos.

Sources:

Shulchan Aruch - Orach Chaim, 247:1.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagen - Mishna Brura, Orach Chaim, 247:a,c,d.

Rabbi Yeshaya Neuwirth - Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasa, 31:20-21.

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Stories for the Soul

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a few years prior, Jack had requested from Reb Moshe a blessing for success in his Torah learning. Reb Moshe, who knew Jack from the neighborhood, replied, "You don't need a bracha for Torah, because you are already a Torah scholar; what you need is a bracha for livelihood." Now, Reb Moshe, who had given him a bracha for parnassa, was ordering him to give up this fortune.

Jack went back on with his life. He never spoke of this incident, but enough people knew about it that word

of Jack's exemplary integrity spread like wildfire both around the neighborhood and throughout the New York business community. People wanted to do business with him and he prospered. The event that had seemed to pull chances of wealth from before Jack's eyes turned out to be the catalyst for Jack's financial success.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman