

A Taste of Torah Not Just In it For the Money

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

No doubt that if we were to write a code of law for monetary matters, we would begin with the most common occurrences, such as interest on loans, the responsibility of the borrower, and other everyday events.

Yet in this week's Parsha, which deals primarily with these types of matters, a strange thing is found. The Torah begins with the tale of one who is unable to repay what he stole, and is sold as a servant to obtain the funds needed for the restitution of his theft. Of all the things the Torah could have chosen, why start with such an unusual, tragically unfortunate, situation?

The Alter of Kelm, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (1824-1898), explains that Hashem is not just giving us a list of laws by which society can function. Rather, He is a Father instructing His beloved children how to properly lead their lives.

And, as a Father, Hashem worries about His children, especially the wayward sons who need extra help. He is concerned about His child who has resorted to theft, and He wants to help him back onto the proper path. To that end, the very first thing Hashem teaches is how to deal with a thief who has hit rock bottom, who doesn't even

have the wherewithal to repay what he stole.

And how, indeed, does the Torah deal with this thief? Hashem provides His children with a wonderful system by which the money can be repaid and the errant son truly rehabilitated.

The court finds a fine, upstanding individual who is willing to purchase the thief's services for the next six years. The money this individual pays will go toward paying for the stolen goods.

Meanwhile, the thief will live with his master for six years. The master must treat his servant as no less than an equal, so much so that if there's only one pillow, the servant gets it and the master does without. The servant thus feels important and appreciated, and he will learn from his master how to live a proper, honest, Jewish life. At the close of the six years, the master is obligated to provide his servant with severance pay. Thus, Hashem provides the one-time thief with the means to begin again on the right foot.

All in all, Hashem has taken care of every detail to provide the thief with a golden opportunity to start life anew. Is it any wonder, then, that the very first matter discussed in the Parsha is that of a thief who is sold to pay off what he stole?

Ask the Rabbi Thou Shalt Not Read

Michael from Pittsburgh wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Does the "Cherem d'Rabbeinu Gershom" ["social excommunication"

ed.] against reading someone's mail also apply to email? At work we all share one email account, and sometimes I find it difficult to overcome my curiosity.

Stories For The Soul

It's Never Too Late

Once, a burly man who had served in the Russian army entered a Jewish inn and ordered a meal, which he ate in a most disgusting manner.

The Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) happened to be a guest at that inn. He saw the man and approached him.

"Is it true that you served in the Russian army?" he asked.

"Yes," snorted the man.

"Tell me," began the Chofetz Chaim, "how did you manage to keep your Jewish identity in those circumstances? And when you could have easily gone to any inn, you chose a Jewish one. You are an inspiration. Where did you find the strength?"

The soldier, clearly moved, replied, "It was so hard; they did everything to make us denounce and forget that we were Jews."

"It is a miracle that you made it through. Now you can begin to learn the Torah and mitzvos that you were deprived of all these years," said the Chofetz Chaim.

"But Rebbi, how can I do that?" the soldier, now sobbing, responded.

"It is still possible," said the Chofetz Chaim. "It is always possible. I can show you how."

From that day on, the former soldier began a path to repentance and eventually became an observant Jew.

Parshas Mishpatim, and indeed the entire Torah, teaches us many detailed laws. Rebbi Akiva once said, "Love your neighbor like yourself. This is the great rule of the Torah." The Chofetz Chaim understood that showing love and compassion was

Kollel Happenings

'THE PECKING ORDER' AT FEB. 2 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Ed Barad, Shareholder, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, and Kollel Dean Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab for "The Pecking Order: Prioritizing the Distribution of Our Time and Resources" at the next Torah for Tycoons, Wed., Feb. 2. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. CLE credits available. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



JOY IN RELATIONSHIPS SERIES TO BEGIN

As part of our "Year of Joy" the Kollel will be offering a four part series on "Joy in Relationships." The first class, "Joy in Community" given by Rabbi Levi Lebovits will be on Mon., Feb. 14 at 7 p.m. at the home of Ken and Chaya Major. For information or to RSVP, please contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or rmh@denverkollel.org



STEINHARTERS TO CHAIR BENEFIT EVENT ON MARCH 15

Rabbi Yissochor and Avigail Steinharter will chair the Kollel's Benefit Event on Wed., March 15, at District 475. Honorees are Dr. Marc and Dale Sievers. The theme of the event is "Joy: Awakening the Power Within." To RSVP, please call 303-820-2855 or visit www.denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Borrowing Without Permission Part VII

Based on what was said last week, one may borrow a tallis or tefillin without asking permission. However, if it is in a closed private locker or cubby, or if it is a brand-new tallis, there is room to believe that the owner would object to his borrowing his tallis and tefillin, and one should refrain from borrowing them without express permission.

After using the tallis or tefillin, they

must be refolded and put back as they were found. On Shabbos, where folding a tallis is problematic, some authorities say it should be folded but not on the original folds. Others exempt refolding altogether on Shabbos.

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

Ask the Rabbi

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Dear Michael,

Rabbeinu Gershom was one of the earliest and greatest scholars of Ashkenazic Jewry. In his times, there arose a need to institute a number of new measures, called "takanos." These included the banning of polygamy and the requirement of mutual consent in divorce.

Amongst his enactments is the one you mentioned - the prohibition against reading people's mail. In those times, Jewish traders in different countries communicated in writing. Often their letters contained sensitive business information which could be very harmful if read by an outsider. As a safeguard against this, Rabbeinu Gershom legislated against reading people's mail.

What about email? Is reading email on a computer screen included in the "Cherem of Rabbeinu Gershom"? I posed this question to Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg shlita, and he made no distinction between regular mail and email.

You wrote, however, that you share a joint account. Here, the question can

be asked, "Is an email message in a joint account like a post card?" Concerning post cards there is a doubt whether or not Rabbeinu Gershom's decree applies, since the sender seems unconcerned if others read it.

On the other hand, perhaps the sender trusts that no one will push the button and "open" the message - just as when you send a letter you expect that no one will open and read it.

I asked Rabbi Scheinberg about this as well. Here, too, he made no distinction between a joint account and a private account. People expect that no one read their messages, and it should not be done.

I hope this knowledge helps you overcome your curiosity. If not, let me remind you of the positive commandment to love your fellow person as yourself. Our Sages explain this as follows: One must not do to somebody else what he wouldn't want the other person to do to him. Would you like someone else to read your personal email?

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Stories for the Soul

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the first step in helping a fellow Jew eventually come to keep all of the

mitzvos in the Torah.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman

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