

A Taste of Torah Down a Different Road

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

A fellow returned home from shul one Shabbos morning, and was asked what the Rabbi had discussed. “Sin,” was the terse reply. “Well,” said his wife, “what did he have to say about it?” “He was against it.”

Sinning is generally not the greatest way to get on G-d’s good side, and, following the Sin of the Spies, G-d decrees that the Jewish People, because of their lack of faith in His ability to overcome the Cannanites, will spend forty years wandering in the desert. After the generation has died out, the next generation will merit entering the Land of Israel.

But there was a group of Jews who terribly regretted their actions, and decided they would conquer the Land right then and there. Despite an admonition from Moshe that G-d was not with them, they took up arms, went to battle... and were promptly decimated by the natives.

The generation that received the Torah reached heights that have never been matched by any subsequent generation. And great people don’t make foolish errors. As such, it is incumbent upon us to understand the motivations of this group. Why would they attempt entry to Eretz Yisroel if Moshe told them they were doomed to failure?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) points out that seemingly, these individuals had done teshuva (repentance) for their misdeed. After failing to place the proper trust in G-d, they were declaring their willingness to enter the Land of Israel with full

faith that G-d would assist them. And, although they seem to have disobeyed Moshe’s directive to abstain, and were told that G-d would not come to their aid, they took this as another challenge they needed to overcome in their process of repentance; namely, that they would have to rely on G-d even when G-d appeared to have abandoned them.

Their mistake, continues Rabbi Dessler, was a failure to realize that when a person commits a sin, he is no longer the same person he was earlier. When a person transgresses G-d’s Will, he allows evil to enter his consciousness, and is subsequently at a different, more challenging level than he was previously. Repentance, therefore, must occur within the new circumstances, and cannot take place at the same point from which he had stood prior to the sin.

Thus, while the Jews were poised to enter the Land of Israel and display their trust in G-d earlier, they were no longer at that plateau following their error. They no longer had the ability to simply accomplish now what they had failed to perform earlier; their service of G-d would require a new path based on their new, post-sin reality.

The upshot of this is that while G-d (as well as Rabbis) is against sin, we ought to realize that sinning not only invites punishment, it also lowers our spiritual level. And while repentance is always possible, and one should never despair, the challenge of returning increases as our spiritual reality plummets with every misdeed.

Stories For The Soul

Stop and Smell the Roses

A man once stopped at a flower shop to order some flowers to be wired to his mother who lived 200 miles away.

As he got out of his car he noticed a young girl sitting on the curb sobbing.

He knelt down beside her and asked, “Is everything okay? Why are you crying?”

“I wanted to buy a red rose for my mother,” the girl replied. “But I only have seventy-five cents, and a rose costs two dollars.”

The man smiled and said, “Come on in with me. I’ll buy you a rose.”

The girl smiled and followed her generous benefactor into the store.

He bought her a rose and then ordered an elegant arrangement for his own mother.

As they were leaving he offered the girl a ride home.

She said, “Yes, please! You can take me to my mother.”

He followed her directions, and was surprised to find that they led to a cemetery.

The girl thanked him, ran out of the car, and placed the rose on a freshly dug grave.

The man wiped tears from his eyes. He turned his car around and went back to the flower shop. He canceled the wire order, picked up a bouquet and drove the 200 miles to his mother’s house.

We often forget to thank Hashem for all the good in our lives. Sometimes, we need a little reminder.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

NEFESH HACHAIM, MONDAYS
@AISH W/RABBI SHACHNE
SOMMERS

Join Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers in studying the timeless work of Rav Chaim Volozhiner, Nefesh Hacham. Tuesday mornings 9:15-9:50 at Aish. For information, please contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



HEART OF THE TORAH - AT AISH OR ANYWHERE

Join Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab and Rabbi Yechiel Erlanger to learn the Ten Commandments - the Heart of the Torah - in depth. This 14-part series will complete the study of the Ten Commandments just in time for the August 1st national and local Grand Siyum Hashas celebrations. Classes are held at Aish & broadcasted via gotomeeting.com. For information, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.



COMMUNITY WIDE SIYUM HASHAS CELEBRATION

The Denver Jewish Community will gather on August 1st, 2012 to honor local Daf Yomi participants and celebrate Torah study in Denver. Celebrate with Denver's own devoted Daf Yomi participants, people who have taught us the meaning of commitment over the past 7 1/2 years. To register, or for more information, visit the Kollel's website, www.denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2800 ext. 7.

Interpersonal Issues

If A Lost Item Has No Valid Identifying Marks

If one found the item after the owner became aware of his loss, it may be kept by the finder, even though the owner hasn't declared his forfeiture of ownership. Thus, one may keep the item only if he is sure that the owner

was already aware of the loss at the time the item was found.

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

Ask the Rabbi

Shakesprayer

Burt Falkenstein wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why is it when we pray to Hashem, many people "shuckle" back and forth while others do not? Isn't it disrespectful to sway back and forth when we are "talking" in our own way to Hashem? Please explain this (I think) "custom." Is it truly disrespectful or is it something else? Thanks.

Dear Burt Falkenstein,

'Shuckling' - swaying back and forth during prayer and Torah study - is a legitimate custom. Several reasons are offered for this custom:

The soul is akin to a flame. Just as a flame always flickers and strives upward, so too the soul is never still, constantly moving and striving to reach upward towards Hashem.

Shaking allows you to pray with your whole body, as King David said, "Let all my bones exclaim 'Hashem, who is like You!'"

When we stand before Hashem in prayer, we tremble in awe of the King of Kings.

The book of the Kuzari gives a historical explanation for 'shuckling.' He explains that shuckling originated during a period when there was a book shortage, and several people needed to study from the same book at the same time. To allow as many people as

possible to study from one book, they would sway alternately back and forth. This allowed each person to look into the book and read a little bit, and when he swayed back, another person could sway forward and look into the book.

A valid alternative to shuckling is to stand completely still, like a soldier standing at attention in front of the king.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zatzal, one of the foremost halachic authorities of our generation, was known to stand stock still during the silent prayer. He explained that, while living in Russia, he was once arrested for teaching Torah. One form of torture he experienced during his imprisonment was being forced to stand completely still facing a wall. The threat was that if he were to move he would be shot. It was on one of these occasions that Rabbi Feinstein was struck with the realization that if he could stand with such intense concentration for the sake of his captors, then he should afford at least the same respect when standing in front of Hashem.

Deciding whether to 'shuckle' or stand still depends on which one helps you concentrate better. In any case, a person shouldn't move his body or contort his face in any way that will make him look weird.

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