

A Taste of Torah Get Real

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Ritual. A term usually associated with religion, it indicates a set, prescribed way by which something is done. There is another word that conveys a similar idea: directions. Yet one seldom uses the term direction in conjunction with religion; directions are usually associated with arts-and-crafts projects, cake mixes, and pre-GPS journeys. What is the difference in the usage of the two terms? I believe that ritual conjures up the idea that there is no good reason to follow the prescribed steps other than the fact that “that’s how it’s done.” “Directions”, on the other hand, are necessary to ensure success. Failure to follow “directions” is to court disaster; it can mean an upside-down model airplane, a flopped cake, or the need to stop at the nearest gas station to extricate oneself from the state of being lost.

So it may come as a surprise, then, that the mitzvos of the Torah, if we are to follow the aforementioned criteria, fit far more neatly into the category of “directions” than “ritual”. Take tzara’as (commonly translated as leprosy, although it is a spiritual malady that manifests itself similarly to that dreaded ailment), for example. The Torah tells us that it is possible for a garment to be afflicted with tzara’as. Under certain circumstances, the Torah requires that the garment be laundered to remove the affliction. If the affliction does not return, the garment is free from any issues, and must be laundered a second time. Why the need for the second laundering, you ask? Rashi

(13:58) preempts the question by stating that when the Torah demands a second “laundering”, it actually refers to immersion in a mikvah. So although the Torah uses the same Hebrew term – kevisah – which normally means laundering – both times, the latter does not refer to a process of physical cleansing of the garment, but rather to a spiritual cleansing process usually referred to as tevilah (immersion).

Which raises another difficulty. If the Torah meant to say tevilah, then say tevilah! Why use the misleading term kevisah which usually refers to physical laundering?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) explains that the Torah deliberately used the same term both times to debunk the notion of ritual. Just as kevisah, laundering, is necessary to cleanse the garment, tevilah is also required to cleanse the garment. And although the garment may appear to be perfectly clean after the initial laundering, its state of spiritual defilement leaves it as unclean as it was before the physical stain was removed.

Mitzvos are not ritual. And the details involved in their performance are not there “because that’s how it’s done”. They are directions. When a mitzvah is performed, there is a very real effect on the universe. Spiritual, to be sure, but an effect that has tremendous ramifications for the physical well-being of the world. And in order for that effect to occur, the directions must be followed. Or the mitzvah will flop just like that cake you tossed in the garbage last week.

Stories For The Soul

The 3-String Violin

It was November 1995 and Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, came on stage to give a concert in New York City. Stricken with polio as a child, he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of two crutches. To see him walk across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is a sight.

That evening, just as he finished the first few bars, one of violin strings broke. You could hear it snap - it went off like gunfire across the room. The crowd knew he’d have to make the painful trek off stage to find another string, or another violin.

But he didn’t. He signaled the conductor to begin again. And he played with such passion and power and purity as they had never heard before. Everyone knows it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. But that night Itzhak Perlman refused to know that. You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head.

When he finished, there was an awesome silence. And then people rose and cheered. He smiled and said, not boastfully, but in a pensive tone, “Sometimes. it is the artist’s task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

After giving birth, a woman brings a purification offering to the Temple. The offering consists of a sheep and a dove. The Torah says that if she cannot afford a sheep then she brings two doves. We see a simple idea that a person should never give up, but should make do with what he has.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek, by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

ABUSING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS' AT MAY. 2 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Dr. John Abrams DDS, Denal Consultant, and Kollel Dean Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab for "Abusing Prescription Drugs Doctor/Patient Responsibilities" at the next Torah for Tycoons, Wed., May 2. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



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 in-depth study of the Ten Commandments just in time for the August 1st national and local Grand Siyum Hashas celebrations. Classes are held at Aish and broadcasted via gotomeeting.com. For more information, contact email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855-820



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS CLASS

Join Mrs. Esti Schwab for an exciting new six-week series, United We Stand, Mondays 11:30 am-1:00 pm at the East Side Kosher Deli, beginning April 16th. The class will focus on creating and bettering our relationships with others. Each week will focus on an independent area of personal growth. For more info email esti@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues

Acceptable Signs for Identifying Lost Objects

A unique feature of the item - such as a pen that has a crack in a particular location, or whose clip has broken off - is a valid means of identification. As mentioned earlier, however, it must be unique. If it is a feature that is common

to this item, it is not a valid sign.

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

Ask the Rabbi

Evil from Birth

Bryan at Columbia University writes:

Does the fact that we have a Yetzer Hara mean that Man is intrinsically evil?

Dear Bryan,

The Yetzer Hara is commonly translated as the "Evil inclination." Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (the Ramchal) in "The Way of G-d" describes the role of the Yetzer Hara in man's quest for perfection.

"Man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to G-d. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will..."

Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good [Yetzer Hatov] and evil [Yetzer Hara], and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice and is able to choose either side knowingly and willingly..."

The Ramchal explains that this balance existed prior to the sin of Adam.

After his sin, however, he became more inclined to listen to the wiles of his Yetzer Hara. His job is now two-fold: First, he must even the balance between the spiritual and the physical. Then, he can work to perfect his soul until his spiritual so overwhelms the physical

that the physical becomes elevated to its level of perfection.

The Yetzer Hara is an inclination to "stray," but Man has the wherewithal to overcome it. The pull of the Yetzer Hara is the more powerful of the two inclinations, but is by no means impossible to conquer.

The Torah states:

"G-d said to Cain, 'Why are you so furious? Why are you depressed? If you do good, will there not be special privilege? And if you do not do good, sin is crouching at the door. It lusts after you but you can dominate it.'"

And the Talmud tells us how:

"So said the Holy One, blessed be he, to Israel: 'My son I created the Yetzer Hara and I created for it the Torah as an antidote. If you toil in Torah you will not be handed over into his hands...'"

Sources:

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto - The Way of G-d, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers.

The Book of Genesis, 4:6-7, [translation by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in "The Living Torah", Moznaim Publishing Company].

The Talmud - Tractate Kiddushin, p.30b.

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