



## A Taste of Torah A Stony Response

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

There was a flurry of activity throughout the encampment of the Jewish People at Mount Sinai. Moshe had just informed them of G-d's commandment to bring the necessary materials for the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), the edifice that would provide the Divine Presence a place to reside among the Bnai Yisroel. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to contribute. Everyone, that is, except for the nesi'im, the princes of the tribes. They waited until everyone else had brought their share. At that point, there was nothing else needed for the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels, except for the precious stones necessary for the special garments worn by the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). And that was all the nesi'im contributed - those precious stones.

Our Sages tell us that the nesi'im were not lackadaisical about donating to the cause. Rather, they intended on filling whatever shortfall still remained after the rest of the nation had completed their contributions. To their chagrin, there was precious little left to give, save for the stones. Yet our Sages tell us that when the Torah tells of the contribution of the nesi'im, the letter "yud" is omitted from the word nesi'im, an indication of Divine disapproval of their actions (or lack thereof). (See Rashi 35:27) This disapproval is puzzling in light of the Sages' explanation that the nesi'im had only the best intentions in mind.

Rabbi Reuven Grozovsky (1886-1958), Rosh Yeshiva of the Kaminetz Yeshiva in pre-WWII-Europe and of Yeshiva Torah Voda'ath of Brooklyn,

explains the error of the nesi'im. Yes, their delay in the performance of the mitzvah was for the sake of Heaven. But they failed to realize that G-d does not give us mitzvos because He needs them; He gives us mitzvos because WE need them. A mitzvah is a means of achieving self-perfection; through the proper performance of the mitzvos, man comes closer to G-d. G-d is perfect and lacks nothing; He gives us the opportunity to serve Him for our own sake. When one is given a mitzvah, it should be performed as commanded; one should not try to make the mitzvah "better" at the expense of its proper fulfillment.

Had the nesi'im properly appreciated this principle, they would have grabbed the opportunity to serve Hashem and not worried about whether or not there would be sufficient material donated. Sure, there was a possibility that there would be a shortfall, but Hashem would manage just fine, and a solution would surely be reached. For the sake of their own spiritual improvement, however, opportunity was knocking. Their failure, at their exalted level, to answer immediately made them deserving of a Divine rebuke. Our Sages tell us that the nesi'im rectified this error at the inauguration of the Mishkan, where they were the first to bring offerings upon the altar. (See Rashi ibid.)

In our own day-to-day affairs, it is imperative for us to realize that although it is important to do a mitzvah in the best manner possible, and not to settle for a half-hearted or half-baked performance, at the same time, one should perform the mitzvah as it was commanded, and not try to "repair" it with his own calculations.

## Stories For The Soul

### Practice What You Preach

Two men once came to a sage to settle a dispute. They owned adjacent fields, and the branches from one of the men's trees protruded onto his neighbor's property.

The neighbor wanted the branches to be removed because it took away his sunlight and airspace, and could prevent him from planting or building in that spot in the future. The first man felt that such a request was unreasonable. After all, the base of the tree was on his side of the line; you have to expect the branches to grow out.

The Rav told them to return the next day for his decision.

The next day, the Rav very briefly said, "This is a simple, clear-cut case. The branches need to be cut down by the owner of the tree."

One of the Rav's disciples later asked, "If it was so clear-cut, why was it necessary to make the men wait a day before giving them the answer?"

The Rav explained, "When the men related their dispute, I realized that I own trees with branches that protrude into my neighbor's airspace. I went out this morning and had those branches cut down, because I didn't want to tell others to do something that I wasn't doing myself."

In this week's Parsha, the Torah relates that before the kohen brought the atonement offering on behalf of the nation, he had to bring a personal atonement offering. Rashi explains that he needed to do his own atonement before atoning for others.

*Adapted with permission from Shul Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.*

## Kollel Happenings

### TUESDAY NIGHT TORAH AT AISH KODESH IN BOULDER

Join the Kollel for a dynamic one-on-one and small groups Torah encounter. Ma'ariv will be held at 8:15 followed by Torah study at 8:30. Program will be held at Aish Kodesh, 1805 Balsam Ave. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org) or Charles Fried at 917-499-4307 or [charlesfried@gmail.com](mailto:charlesfried@gmail.com).



### 'BREAKING THE BROKER' AT MARCH 2 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Marty Zimmerman, President, Zim Consulting, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for "Breaking the Broker: Circumventing the Middleman" at the next Torah for Tycoons, Wed., March 2. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. CLE credits pending. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org)



### BENEFIT EVENT JOURNAL DEADLINE MON., FEB. 28

The deadline for ads for the March 15 Benefit Event is Mon., Feb. 28. Dr. Marc and Dale Sievers will be receiving the Community Leadership Award and Rabbi Yissochor and Avigail Steinharter are the event chairs. The event will be held at District 475, with guest speaker Rabbi Ephraim Eliyahu Shapiro addressing the theme, "Joy: Awakening the Power Within." To place an ad or RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org)

## Interpersonal Issues Prohibition of Envy Part II

*Lo sisaveh* and *lo sachmod* are not limited to pressuring the owner to sell the desired item. Pressuring the owner to give a desired item as a gift is also forbidden.

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

## Ask the Rabbi Grave Gravel

Eytan M. Rodin from St. Louis, MO wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the significance behind the fact that we put stones on graves that we visit?

Cosette Sullivan from San Angelo, Texas wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I've been asked why Jews place rocks on graves...I don't know! Will you please give me the answer?

Dear Eytan M. Rodin and Cosette Sullivan,

A very early reference to this custom is found in a commentary to the Shulchan Aruch, written by Rav Yehuda Ashkenazi (early 1700s), called the Ba'er Heitev. He quotes the Maharash, who explains that the custom of placing stones or tufts of grass on the grave is for the honor of the deceased person by marking the fact that his grave has been visited.

Once, when I was touring the Mount of Olives cemetery, my Yerushalmi tour guide told me the following story, a story that purports to explain this custom:

Sometime during the Turkish occupation of Israel, on a Shabbos, an Arab was murdered in Jerusalem. Quickly, the rumor spread that he was killed by a Jew, and an immediate expulsion order was declared. The Jews of Jerusalem had to pick themselves up and leave or be killed. A noted kabbalist

(mystic) came upon the scene of the crime, which was crowded with Arab onlookers. Even though it was Shabbos, the kabbalist wrote one of G-d's names on a piece of paper and placed it upon the body of the dead man. The dead man rose and pointed to one of the Arabs standing in the crowd who became violently afraid and admitted that he had done the killing. The expulsion order was rescinded.

Shortly afterwards the kabbalist, who was an elderly man, approached the chevra kadisha (burial society) and asked that his tombstone be pelted with stones after his death because he had written during Shabbos. He understood that due to the danger to life he had been permitted to desecrate the Shabbos, but he felt that some form of repentance was in order nevertheless. Stoning his grave would symbolize the stoning penalty meted out to Shabbat desecraters. At first, the chevra kadisha refused because of the implied dishonor the stoning would represent, but the kabbalist persisted. Finally, they agreed to place stones on his grave, but only if they would institute the custom that all graves would have stones placed on them in the future. If stones were placed on everyone's grave, it would not be a dishonor to the kabbalist. From then on, stones were placed on the graves of all Jews buried in Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem the custom spread, and today Jews all over the world place stones on tombstones when visiting a grave.

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