

A Taste of Torah

Give Me a Break

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

If you've ever been called up to the Torah for shevi'i or maftir, the final two portions of the Shabbos Torah reading, you may have noticed a large space at the end of the weekly Torah portion. This space is a standard break placed in the Torah scroll to demarcate the end of one portion and the beginning of the next. There is, however, one exception: Between the portions of Vayigash, last week's reading, and Vayeichi, this week's reading, there is no space.

Rashi (47:28) explains the reason behind the break from the break. Parshas Vayeichi discusses the death of Ya'akov; once Ya'akov died, the hearts and eyes of the Jewish Nation were closed, as the Egyptian bondage began. To signify this closing, the parsha is deprived of the usual space, and left "closed".

There is a very basic problem with Rashi's comments, however. Even after Ya'akov's death, the Jewish People were not enslaved for many years. Yosef was still the viceroy of Egypt, a position he held until his death many years later. Even after Yosef's passing, the enslavement only began after the last of the twelve brothers, Levi, departed from this world. How, then, can we posit that the bondage began with Ya'akov's death?

There are various approaches to this question; I'd like to share one that I believe is quite relevant to us in this day and age. As the parsha proceeds, we discover that Yosef has sworn to his father that he will bury him in the Land of Canaan, in the Cave of Machpela,

and will insure that he will not be buried in Egypt. Upon Ya'akov's passing, however, Yosef needs to ask Pharaoh for permission before taking his father to Eretz Canaan. After some considerable arm-twisting, Pharaoh assents, only because he realizes that Yosef cannot break his oath.

Please take a moment to reflect on what transpired in Egypt at that time. Yosef, the second-most powerful individual in all of Egypt, was unable to leave the country without receiving express permission from Pharaoh. And he had a hard time getting aforesaid permission. Even to bury his illustrious father, Ya'akov.

It should be dawning on you by now that even at this point, the fledgling Jewish Nation in Egypt wasn't as free as we'd thought. Despite their prosperity, despite their considerable political clout, they were beholden to the whims of Pharaoh. A harbinger of events still to come in Egypt. The Egyptian bondage had, indeed, begun with the passing of Ya'akov.

The Jewish People today are in exile, as well. And although Hashem has seen fit to grant us the right to practice our religion, economic freedom, and even a state governed by Jews, we must always remember that we are still in exile. We are still beholden to the whims of other nations. Even in our own land. Until the coming of the Moshiach, we are in bondage. May we all merit to greet Moshiach, speedily, in our days.

Stories For The Soul

A Final Kindness

Judith Kaplan, dressed in her Shabbos finery, sat in a tent outside the New York City Medical Examiner's office, reciting Tehillim. From midnight until 5 a.m., within sight of trucks full of body parts from the World Trade Center, she fulfilled the mitzva of shmira: keeping watch over the dead, who must not be left alone from the time of passing until burial.

Normally, this ritual lasts for only 24 hours and is performed by one Jew for another Jew. But the weeks following 9/11 were not normal times. The round-the-clock vigil outside the morgue on First Avenue and 30th Street went on for weeks. The three sealed trucks may or may not have contained Jewish bodies.

Ms. Kaplan, 20, a senior at Stern College, was one of nine students who had volunteered for this task on Shabbos. The rest of the time, the task was performed by volunteers from Ohev Zedek Synagogue, but on Shabbos, it was too far for them to walk to the morgue. The Stern students, whose dormitories are within blocks of the morgue, filled the breach.

The students' dedication won blessings from Christian chaplains at the site, and moved police officers and medical examiners to tears. Several volunteers said they were fearful at first, but that their fears were replaced by peace, and a kind of joy.

Yaakov's sons went to great pains to provide a proper burial for their father. Proper respect for the dead has always been a hallmark of Judaism.

Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Baruch Lederman

Kollel Happenings

THE LATE SHOW: THURS. NIGHT SEDER AT AISH

Join the Chevra for learning and cholent at Aish. Maariv is at 9:00 p.m. followed by learning and refreshments. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855



WEST SIDE NIGHT SEDER AT THE KOLLEL

Join the West Side community for vibrant Torah learning at the Kollel. Sunday- Thursday, except Wednesday, learning from 8-9 p.m., followed by Ma'ariv. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



LIBERATED PARENTS, LIBERATED CHILDREN WITH MRS. AVIGAIL STEINHARTER

Join Mrs. Avigail Steinharter for "Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family." This six part series for moms integrates the timeless wisdom of the Torah with the approach of the world-renowned Dr. Haim Ginott. Classes will be held on Tues., Jan 10, Jan 17, Jan 24, Jan 31, Feb 10, Feb 17 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at Barnes & Noble, 960 S. Colorado Blvd. Cost: \$80 for all six classes. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues

Returning Lost Objects

Included in the mitzvah of returning lost objects is the obligation of preventing or minimizing damage to someone else's property. For example, if one notices a leak in someone's home, he must try to prevent further loss, such as by turning off the water supply or,

if this isn't feasible, by contacting the owner.

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

Ask the Rabbi

World Wide Wabbi

Sam Saal wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

While "Ask the Rabbi" is an interesting and useful service, do you think it should be relied upon as halacha? A few problems come to mind: First, there's the problem of it becoming a service through which someone could "shop" for a rabbinic opinion. Also, do you have the knowledge that a Rav must have about the details of the specific situation, some of which even the person himself may not recognize when he poses his question? Trivial example: Will you verify whether the questioner is of Ashkenazic or Sephardic background before answering a question about whether something is chametz? And what about "Asei L'cha Rav (Make for yourself a teacher)?" Once again, while this service has the potential to be very valuable, I think it should always come with a disclaimer that it is not an appropriate avenue for a p'sak (definitive halachic ruling).

Dear Sam Saal,

Throughout the ages people have written their Halachic questions and mailed them to the Rav of their choice. "Ask the Rabbi" is simply a modern twist on an old practice.

Should "Ask the Rabbi" include a disclaimer that it is not an appropriate avenue for a Halachic ruling? For many people "Ask the Rabbi" is the only avenue, as they have no Rabbi in their

community. And those who do have access to a Rabbi may choose to "Ask the Rabbi" for personal reasons. By the way, for each public column that is published, there are tens of personal replies sent to individuals, dealing with a great variety of issues.

As far as "shopping" for a p'sak: Someone who wants to ask different Rabbis until he gets the answer he's looking for can do so whether he asks his question in person, on the phone, or using smoke signals. If the questioner has been to another Rav before asking us, it is up to him to inform us of that.

It is the Rabbi's responsibility to investigate details of the question. If the answer to a particular question would be different for an Ashkenazi or for a Sephardi, then clarification would be requested, and/or the difference would be included in the answer. Don't forget, e-mail is an interactive medium.

Accessing "Torah information" without a personal connection to a Rabbi may lead to "talking donkey" syndrome. The Torah is not something you borrow from the library. The ideal Torah way of life includes living in an observant community, surrounded by learned people, and having personal contact with a Rabbi. "Ask the Rabbi" is by no means intended as a substitute for any of this.

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