

A Taste of Torah

Haste Makes Waste

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

Ya'akov Avinu is on his deathbed, ready to give his sons his final blessings before he passes on to the next world. The first to get a blessing is the eldest son, Re'uven. But instead of a blessing, Ya'akov scathingly criticizes Re'uven. "Haste like water, do not take more" (Bereishis 49:4), says Ya'akov. Although Re'uven, as the firstborn, should have merited to both the priesthood and the kingship, his hastiness, as expressed through his actions during his lifetime (see Bereishis 35:22 and Rashi *ibid.*), cost him these privileges.

A separate discussion is necessary to examine why Ya'akov chose to criticize Re'uven at this juncture instead of blessing him; we will limit the discussion here to examining what exactly Ya'akov's criticism was.

Rabbi Yissachar Rothchild *zt"l* explained that haste, in fact, has the potential to be a great virtue. It is better known as *zerizus*, alacrity, a very admirable trait for a person to have. *Zerizus* is necessary for a person to perform mitzvos promptly with the proper enthusiasm.

However, *zerizus* is preceded by another important trait, that of *zehirus*,

watchfulness. *Zehirus* means that one does not rush into things, but rather thinks them through carefully and insures that no evil will be part of or result from one's actions. Of course, alacrity is important. But it must be preceded by the necessary contemplation and patience so that there is no negative fallout.

Ya'akov's criticism of Re'uven was, that although he possessed the trait of *zerizus*, there was a failing (at Re'uven's supremely exalted level) in the trait of *zehirus*, of waiting and contemplating his actions before rushing into them.

In the famed Kelm Yeshiva, they noted that Re'uven never actually lost his state as the firstborn; he is referred to as the firstborn in several places, despite his errors. However, he is regarded as a "blemished" firstborn and therefore unfit to serve as a kohen or as a ruler. That "blemish" is the haste with which Ya'akov characterized him. To be a leader and make decisions, be they of a halachic nature, as a kohen, or of a judicial or executive nature, as a king, *zehirus* - patience and forethought - is a must. And since Ya'akov found Re'uven, at his tremendously refined level, lacking in this area, he felt that he was unfit to fill these roles.

Ask the Rabbi

Cover Up

Gabor Borbely from Las Vegas, Nevada wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can you please tell me shortly about

the *minhag* (custom) of covering our heads?

Tamar Tessler from Johannesburg, South Africa wrote:

Stories For The Soul

Channeling Waters

Before Ya'akov passed away he admonished and advised his sons. He chastised his son Re'uven (Gen. 49:4), describing him as "*pachaz kemayim*" (haste like water). This is a reference to the following incident:

Ya'akov had four wives; Rochel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. He had several children from each wife. Rochel and Leah were especially distinguished in that they were two of the Matriarchs of the Jewish people. Bilhah was Rochel's maidservant and had been given to Ya'akov by Rochel, and Zilpah was a servant to Leah. When all four were alive, Ya'akov kept his bed in Rochel's tent. This was an honor for her. After Rochel died, Ya'akov moved his bed from her tent to the tent of Bilhah because of the association between Bilhah and Rochel. Re'uven, the eldest son of Yaakov & Leah, was enraged by this and moved the bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's tent. After all, Leah was a Matriarch. How could Ya'akov snub her like this?

Ya'akov was not just criticizing the act Re'uven committed; but, by describing him as *pachaz kemayim*, he was critiquing some trait in Reuven. What precisely was that trait? Rabbi Moshe Dov Harris explained this as follows: Rashi comments that Re'uven was "quick to show anger". Re'uven allowed his emotion, in this case anger, to creep in while he was making his decision. When this happens, it distorts one's internal decision making process. The proper way is to calmly and methodically analyze the situation and arrive at a rational, thorough decision. After that point, anger can be used to fuel the resolve to carry out a decision. This way the decision is not skewed for it was not arrived at in a murky emotional state. In other words, anger is okay if it

continued on back

continued on back

Kollel Happenings

FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., DEC. 19 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on Dec. 19 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Yehuda Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org



JEWISH CHILDREN'S EXTRAVAGANZA TO BE HELD ON DEC. 24

This year, the Kollel's annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza will be held on Fri., Dec. 24 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Funtastic Fun, 3085 S. Broadway. Cost: Children \$9, adults \$2. Admission includes unlimited rides. Kosher hot dog lunches will be sold for \$5. This year's program will feature a pre-Shabbos salon for girls. For free tickets, visit www.mazeltot.org. For early-bird and group specials, visit www.denverkollel.org.



LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING ON FRI. DEC. 24

The next legal holiday learning program will take place on Friday, Dec. 24 at Zera Avraham. The topic will be, "Crossed Up: Is Christianity Considered Idolatry?" The program is for men only and will start with Shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and a class from 9-10. \$125 sponsorship is still available. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rye@denverkollel.org.

Interpersonal Issues Borrowing Without Permission

Using another's property without permission is a form of theft. Even if one intends to return the borrowed item to the exact place from which he removed it and in the exact condition that it was taken, it is forbidden. This applies even to the possessions of a minor.

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

Ask the Rabbi

continued from front

Dear Rabbi,

Where are there halachos (laws) about yarmulkes? How do we know which size is kosher? Material? Are there any halachos regarding the positioning of the yarmulke on the head? I know this could be a touchy question (political correctness!). Thank you for answering.

Dear Gabor Borbely and Tamar Tessler,

The Talmud says "cover [the child's] head so that he will have the fear of heaven." The Talmud also associates a covered head with humility.

In "Guide for the Perplexed," Maimonides states that the early Sages were repelled by a bare head. The custom to wear a head covering is legislated in

Shulchan Aruch.

The color and material depend on custom. Some prefer multi-colored versions, some prefer black. The Chasam Sofer in his responsa says yarmulkes may be crocheted or woven even if hair sticks through. Regarding size, there are differing views. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, shlita, requires that the kippa be big enough to be seen from all sides, but other authorities, including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, disagree and say that there is no size specification. I am not familiar with any source regarding where exactly to position the yarmulke.

Reprinted with permission of Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem, www.ohr.edu

Stories for the Soul

continued from front

is allowed in only later. It is not okay if one is "quick to show anger", for then the decision will be tainted, even if only on a subconscious level, by the anger.

Rabbi Dovid Kronglass was once chastising a student in a most strong manner. At that moment, another student who had just announced his engagement that day, walked over. Rabbi Kronglass gave the chasan (groom) a warm and hearty Mazel Tov. His face was beaming with love and happiness for this student; you never could have guessed what he had just been doing with the first student. As soon as the

chasan walked away, Rabbi Kronglass continued the tongue-lashing with the same passion and fury he had at first. He was in complete control of the situation and of himself.

Rabbi Elya Lopian would wait an hour, a day, or even a week, before chastising an errant child or student in order to be sure that he bore no trace of personal anger. This way, his rebuke stemmed from love, not anger. Even if he showed anger, he did not actually feel anger.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman