1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah
A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

PARSHAS PINCHAS – IT'S NOT ABOUT US

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

After Hashem informed Moshe that he would not be allowed to bring Bnai Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, Moshe requested that Hashem appoint someone to take his place. The Medrash asserts that Moshe had hoped that one of his own sons would be selected for this position. The Medrash goes on to state: HKBH said to him, "Your sons sat around and did not engage in Torah. Yehoshua served you a lot and showed you respect; and he came early and stayed late in your study hall; he arranged the benches and spread out the mats. Since he served you with all his might, he is worthy to serve as the leader of Yisrael." The Medrash says that Yehoshua merited his position because he served Moshe by showing him respect for and attending to the physical needs of the bais medrash. There is no mention at all of his level of Torah scholarship or even of his toil in Torah.

The Gemara (Berachos 7b) states, "Greater is serving a Talmid Chacham than learning from him as it says, 'Elisha the son of Shefat, who poured water on the hands of Eliyahu, is here.' It does not say who learned [from Eliyahu] rather "who poured water." This teaches us that greater is the service than learning. The Maharsha explains that very often Torah study discusses halachos that are not relevant to daily life. However, by serving a Talmid Chacham and being constantly in his presence one can not only learn practical halachos, but one can also see very clearly how they are performed. Also, one can perceive the great degree of discretion exercised by Talmidei Chachamim in making critical decisions.

Our Medrash demonstrates another dimension and advantage of serving a Talmid Chacham. It is the facilitating of the scholar's Torah knowledge to be taught and disseminated. Yehoshua understood that greatness in Torah goes way beyond studying its teachings. There is a broader picture which involves every single facet – big and small – that contributes to there being more Torah in a shul, a bais medrash, a city, a country or the entire world. It may involve raising funds, building structures, providing tables, setting up benches, buying food or other supplies. There are literally hundreds of other considerations. A Torah leader is one who is prepared to do whatever it takes.

Rav Yosef Kahaneman, the Ponovezher Rav, was a classic example of this principle. In Europe he had demonstrated exceptional brilliance and great prowess in learning, and his peers expected that he would become one of the next Gedolei Hador. However, when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael, he decided to reestablish the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. Raising huge sums of money, acquiring sufficient land for his yeshiva, building a community around the yeshiva and a myriad of other responsibilities left him little time to devote to his Torah studies. He traveled the world seeking the necessary funds to maintain the yeshiva, often meeting with failure and suffering extreme bizyonos. In his older years he would continue to go abroad to raise money despite the toll it took on his poor health. This was because it wasn't about what was best for him, it was about what was best for Torah.

And don't forget the basics. Whether it is "arranging the benches" or putting away the sefarim in their proper places, they contribute significantly to the learning of Torah. The tremendous importance of putting back sefarim has been stressed by such prominent Gedolim as Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman and the Steipler Gaon. Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein observes there are many people who study Torah very diligently, yet neglect to put back all the sefarim that they use during their many hours of learning. They may ultimately have to answer for all the hours wasted by others looking for those sefarim. Perhaps these people may not have been concerned about what is best for the study of Torah, but only about what accommodates their own Torah study.

So, when you leave a shul or a bais medrash, why take just your own sefarim? Grab a whole bunch of siddurim, chumashim or anything else lying around and put them back in their place. After all, it's not about us; it's about Klal Yisrael and the Torah.

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

Please contact R' Ungar (Ymungar@gmail.com) with questions or comments

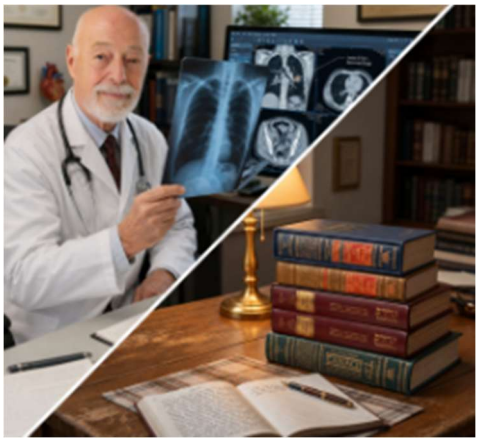
QUESTION: We are having a big birthday party for my great grandfather on ליל שבת. We ordered an extra-large birthday cake that will have the words HAPPY BIRTHDAY on it in big colorful letters. Is it מותר to read the words happy birthday on שבת?

ANSWER: One category of reading material that is אסור on שבת is business related material. A second category is any non-business material, which is אסור to read because of a גזירה that it might lead to reading business related material. This includes reading anything other than תורה, any topic that teaches you good traits, any topic that is about a צורך הגוף, or any topic that is a מצוה. All other reading material is technically אסור. This would include novels, magazines, newspapers, and any other parve reading. However, the מגן אברהם allows everything in this second category, if one enjoys it. This היתר does not apply to business related material which is אסור even if it is enjoyed. Reading a simple name, street sign, a simple word or two that doesn't really tell any story or topic, is not included in forbidden reading. Therefore, happy birthday, street signs, just a name under a caption, a name on a yarmulka, a name on a door, an address, etc. is all permitted reading on שבת.

עי' סימן ש"ז סעי' י"ג, ט"ו וט"ז. עיין מגן אברהם סימן ש"א ס"ק ד'. ועי' שער הציון סימן ש"א אות ז' שכ' שהמגן אברהם דחוק מאד. זה דשם בעלמא מותר הוא ממגן אברהם סי' שכ"ג הובא במ"ב שם ס"ק כ'. ועי' ספר איל משולש על שטרי הדיוטות פרק י' ליותר ביאור.

THE OATH

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner



Deborah, a non-Jewish woman living in the United States was not feeling well. She went to the doctor. After running some tests and scans, the doctor discovered that she had an advanced form of cancer.

He told her, "This is extremely aggressive. As far as we can tell, there is no real hope. You should get your affairs in order and prepare for the worst."

In her desperation, Deborah cried out to Hashem. She said, "G-d, if You cure me of this cancer, which the doctors have given up on, I swear to You that I will become Jewish. I will study, convert, and become part of the Jewish people." That was her plea to Hashem.

And then, incredibly, within a short time, Deborah made a miraculous recovery. It was so remarkable that the doctors themselves said, "This is a medical miracle. We do not understand it. We have never seen anything like this before." She was completely healed. Now she had to keep her word.

Deborah reached out to a local rabbi and rebbetzin and told them that she wanted to convert. She was sincere. They began teaching her, arranged chavrusas for her, and helped her begin the process of geirus.

The process of geirus is very demanding. A person who wants to become Jewish has to learn many halachos, including hilchos Shabbos and hilchos kashrus. It requires commitment, discipline, and real sacrifice. But Deborah was serious, and she continued learning diligently.

Her parents, however, were not supportive. When they found out what she was doing, they were deeply upset. To them, her decision to become Jewish felt like a rejection of their beliefs and of the way they had raised her. They felt hurt, insulted, and completely opposed to the idea. This was very painful for Deborah.

Still, she persevered. She kept learning, kept growing, and came closer and closer to the day of her conversion. She had already learned a great deal and was almost ready. Perhaps she needed just one more test, or a little more preparation, before she could go to the mikvah and be accepted by the Beis Din. Then, suddenly, she told the rebbetzin who had been working with her, "I am sorry. I just cannot go through with this. It is too much. It is going to break my parents' hearts." And she quit.

She gave up on the conversion and returned to living as a non-Jew. This was not what anyone had expected. The Rebbetzin knew the whole story. She knew that Deborah had begun the geirus process because of the oath she had made. Deborah had sworn that if Hashem healed her, she would convert.

The rebbetzin was very concerned. Breaking an oath is a serious matter and a severe aveirah. So the following question was brought to Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Normally, we do not proselytize. In fact, the geirus process is intentionally demanding because we want to make sure that the person truly wants to join Klal Yisrael. But perhaps this case was different.

Here, Deborah had sworn that she would become Jewish. She was already close to completing the process, and perhaps all she needed was some encouragement and support to follow through. Should they try to persuade her to change her mind and continue with the geirus? So the question brought before Rav Chaim Kanievsky was this: Do they now have an obligation to try to convince Deborah to complete the geirus process? What do you think? See Chashukei Chemed Nedarim page 539

Regarding last week's question about the wedding band, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim, page 520) writes that the band leader is not allowed to ask for additional payment for the wedding for two reasons. First, he was already miya'yesh about getting paid. Second, he had already been paid by having the mechitza put up, causing a tremendous Kiddush Hashem.

THE GREATEST PLEASURE

Rav Moshe Wolfson would often teach that one can get tremendous pleasure from Tefilla. He illustrated this with the following story.

A chassid once came to R' Aharon Karliner, the Beis Aharon and told him that the local poritz (gentile landowner) had been gripped by a desire to go sledding. The problem was that this happened in July, when there was no snow on the ground.

No matter. The poritz's servants knew that "what the poritz wants, the poritz gets," or else they would suffer the consequences. But the only substitute for snow that they could find was sugar, which was so prohibitively expensive at the time that most people could not afford to put a spoonful in their tea.

The poritz's men purchased hundreds of sacks of sugar and spread the precious grains out across a large area. They then hitched a sled to his two white stallions, and the poritz went sledding on that sugar.

"Isn't it something?" the chassid asked the Beis Aharon. "The poritz can get whatever earthly pleasure he desires." But the Beis Aharon was not impressed. "You call that pleasure? I assure you that whatever pleasure the poritz had from his sledding does not in any way compare to the pleasure I derive from saying Nishmas on Shabbos morning!"

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