

Kehillah #18

TORAH INSIGHT FOR THE WEEK



Letting Our Souls Shine

by Rabbi Yaacov Haber | Rav of Kehillas Shivtei Yeshurun, Ramat Beit Shemesh

If G-d wanted us to become so great, why didn't He supply us with an atmosphere more conducive to holiness?

In this week's parasha, we find the Jews journeying deep into the desert between countries. They were not Egyptians anymore, and they were not yet Israelis. G-d warned them: "After the doings of the land of Egypt, where you lived, you shall not do, and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do" (Vayikra 18:3). The Jews were expected to develop a national character based upon the Torah, and then live by it in their own country, Eretz Yisrael.

Egypt was among the most immoral, depraved countries in the world; Canaan was inhabited by seven nations that were even more immoral and depraved than the Egyptians. The Jews had a tremendous job on their hands: to rise above the moral level of the Egyptians, the Canaanite nations and every nation on earth to be a light unto the nations.

We started off with quite a handicap. If G-d wanted us to become so great, why didn't He supply us with an atmosphere more conducive to holiness

instead of sandwiching us between the bad and the worse? The Jewish soul had to learn to shine in even the darkest places. Our souls had to be trained to sparkle in their uniqueness. This is the only way we can fulfill our historic mandate. Indeed the Talmud asks, "What good is a lamp in the sunshine?"

The Jewish people possessed beautiful souls, souls they inherited from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We needed to be Jews, not Egyptians and not Canaanites. We needed to get in touch with who we were and bring that to the world. The Jewish people have traveled far and wide, across countless countries around the world, but the characteristics we assumed there are mere prisms by which our essential Jewish character can be viewed. We need to teach our children to know their own souls and to make them shine.



THE PERTINENT PARASHA

Living the Good Life

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer

The message is that Torah life is the good life; living by the Torah is the best possible life upon this world.

The pasuk urges us to live by the Torah: "And you shall guard My statutes and My ordinances, which a person shall perform and live by them – I am Hashem" (Vayikra 18:5).

Chazal's derasha on the pasuk is well known. As Rashi notes, the pasuk teaches us a halachic lesson: a person

is not obligated to die for the upkeep of mitzvos. We are to live by them, rather than die for their sake.

Simply understood, however, the meaning of the verse is harder to understand. What does living by the mitzvos mean? Although the mitzvos infuse our lives with a higher, more elevated plane, surely we can live well even without them? What, then, is the simple meaning of "and live by them"?

The Ramban, apparently disturbed by this problem, explains that the pasuk (on the *peshat* level) refers to the ordinances alone – the regulations (such as prohibitions against murder or damage) that order a good society and facilitate life. Yet, this appears difficult: the pasuk mentions both *chukim* and *mishpatim*, and limiting "and live by them" to *mishpatim* alone is strained.

On this level, perhaps the Torah is telling us a simple yet profound insight. The message is that Torah life is the good life; living by the Torah is the best possible life upon this world. The Pasuk thus states the Torah way is the way of life, the way of goodness and blessing.

A similar message is found in the book of Devarim, in which one of the four questions of Seder Night (the wise son) is found: "If your son shall ask you tomorrow, saying, 'What are these testimonies, statutes, and ordinances that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded you?'" (Devarim 6:20). The Torah provides the answer: we were enslaved to Pharaoh, and Hash-



em brought us forth with signs and wonders, leading us to the Promised Land.

The laws and ordinances, the answer continues, are about living the good life in the Land: “And Hashem instructed us to perform all of these laws, to be in awe of Hashem, our G-d, for our continuous good, that he might preserve us alive, as this day” (Devarim 6:24). Our upkeep of the mitzvos promises us a good life. The best life.

Aside from the covenantal obligation to follow the word of Hashem, there is thus another reason to keep His statutes: because they are for our good. A life of trust in Hashem and of Torah observance is a good life – the opposite of the slavery we suffered in Egypt. Just as fidelity in a marriage simultaneously fulfills a covenantal obligation and bequeaths us blissful and wholesome lives, so does keeping the Torah. It achieves both.

It is worth remembering this simple lesson. Hashem does not wish us to suffer. On the contrary, the pasuk in Tehillim urges us to “taste and behold that Hashem is good” (34:9). The mitzvos are part and parcel of Hashem’s goodness. They are the Divine prescription for a good life.

This does not mean that life is always easy. We all know that life is no picnic, and there are good reasons for that, too. There is also pain and suffering, sometimes harsh and intense. There is much that we cannot explain. Yet, we need to remember that Hashem’s will is goodness – “life is His will” (Tehillim 30:6) – and that this goodness is latent in a Torah life. Choosing Torah is choosing goodness. As the Torah notes (Devarim 30:19), it is choosing life.

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Contending With Customs of Non-Jews

Rabbi Asher Meir

Our parasha opens with the special sacrificial avodah of Yom Kippur, which is addressed particularly to Aharon, the Kohen Gadol. It continues in Vayikra 17 with the sanctity of all sacrifices, which are brought only in the Mikdash, and prohibitions on eating blood and *cheilev* fats, which are dedicated to the altar. This section is addressed to Aharon, his sons and to the entire people of Israel.

Jewish men who go bareheaded in the workplace...just want to keep their jobs.

In Vayikra 18, the Torah prohibits various kinds of licentious relationships; this section is addressed to the entire people. As the Ramban explains, the Torah is emphasizing that holiness in the Jewish people is not something reserved for the priests, the religious functionaries. Every single Jew is required to act with sanctity and abstinence.

The third section begins, "You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; nor shall you follow their laws." Rashi, based on the Sifra (Midrash Halacha), explains that

"their laws" refer to "their social customs," which have assumed the character of laws such as the frequenting of theaters and racetracks. Rabbi Meir, however, states that "their laws" refer to the "ways of the Amorites: (superstitious practices), which our Rabbis have enumerated."

This prohibition is enumerated in the count of the mitzvos (Rambam Prohibitions 30), and is brought down in the *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 178). Jews are obviously not commanded to avoid everything non-Jews customarily do. After all, we also need to eat food, wear clothes and earn a living. So Chazal and the poskim suggested criteria for which customs are "non-Jewish" and why.

The Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvos* LT 30) views the prohibition as keeping us from absorbing doctrines opposed to the Torah. He specifies that the prohibition applies to the ways of the "deniers" and avers that the gatherings mentioned in the Sifra were for the purpose of worshiping idols. He also touches on the intention involved, quoting a Sifri (Re'eh 81), which prohibits saying "Since they wear red, I will also wear red; since they wear helmets, I also will wear a helmet."

The Maharik (Rav Yosef Colon, 15th-



century Italy) permitted Jewish doctors to conform to a regulation requiring physicians to wear a specific uniform. He concluded that the prohibition of the “ways of the non-Jews” applied only in two cases: fixed customs with no evident reason (thus giving rise to suspicion that they originate in superstition or idolatry) or customs that are connected to licentiousness (a logical inference from our parasha). His ruling was influential and is mentioned in the Rema.

In practice, what is considered to be specifically a Jewish or non-Jewish practice is a chicken-and-egg question; over time some customs end up being unique to specific communities.

Kippahs in the Workplace

The question of *chukos hagoyim* (customs of the non-Jews) arises frequently in the workplace. Many poskim have considered the question of men going bare-headed in the workplace. On the one hand, the Taz (OC 8:3) rules that men covering their heads – a special sign – is now so widespread that going bare-headed transgresses the prohibition of *chukos hagoyim*.

On the other hand, the very conformist American workplace of the mid-20th century did not tolerate any deviations

from the norm, including wearing a kippah. Among the recent poskim who ruled leniently were Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe* YD 4:11) and Rav Ovadiah Yosef (*Yabia Omer* 9:1). Rav Moshe points out that even non-religious Americans go bareheaded, so this custom can’t possibly be connected to any religion or superstition. Rav Ovadiah focuses on intention: Jewish men who go bareheaded in the workplace are not striving to emulate non-Jews; they just want to keep their jobs.

Rav Ovadiah concludes by pointing out that this leniency does not apply in a Jewish workplace in contemporary Israel. Here, Baruch Hashem, there is a well-established norm that religious men cover their heads at all times. Going without a kippah would involve *maris ayin* – giving the impression that one is not committed to mitzvos.

We can be grateful that today it is widely accepted in American workplaces to wear a kippah at work, or for that matter an afro or a beard. Fifty years ago, most offices obligated men to be clean-shaven and have short haircuts. Many African-Americans felt obligated to straighten their hair, and even the most Haredi Jewish men customarily went bare-headed in the office.



PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

Connecting to G-d By Working in Eretz Yisrael

Rabbi Tzvi Broker

The Midrash Rabbah in Parashas Kedoshim questions how we can be expected to experience dveykus with Hashem: "Rav Yehuda Bar Simon said: It says 'After Hashem your G-d you should follow.' But is it possible for a human of flesh and blood to follow after Hashem of whom it says, 'In the seas are your ways and your paths are in the great waters'? The Torah commands us that 'after Hashem we should follow and cleave to him.' Is it possible for a human of flesh and blood to go up to the heavens and cleave to the Shechinah of whom it says, 'And Hashem your G-d is compared to a fiery flame.'?"

The Midrash's answer gives insight into one surprising but practical application of dveykus: "Rather, here is what can be done. In the beginning of the creation, Hashem was involved in planting. As the verse teaches, 'And Hashem planted Gan Eden.' So, too, when the Jews go into Eretz Yisrael, they should immediately be involved in planting. As the verse teaches, 'When you come to the Land and you plant any food tree, you shall surely block its fruit [from use], it shall be blocked from you [from use] for three years, and not be eaten.'"

This pasuk – known for the laws of orlah – is teaching something fundamental about the process of developing the land of Eretz Yisrael itself: it is an act of dveykus! In describing the mitzvah of settling the land of Israel, the Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe*, Parshas Shoftim) expands the classically understood mitzvah of developing the land's agriculture to include other jobs: "And not only working the land alone, but the study of all professions are included, because of the mitzvah of developing and bringing honor to Eretz Yisrael is to avoid a situation where people could say that Eretz Yisrael



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PARASHA AND PARNASSAH



doesn't have shoemakers, builders or any profession, and they will import such professionals from outside of Eretz Yisrael.”

In the worldview of the Chasam Sofer, the mitzvah of settling and honoring Eretz Yisrael enables Eretz Yisrael to become a dwelling place that meets the needs of those living there. In this light, the development of all professions in Eretz Yisrael takes on a whole new value.

The message of this week's parasha and the words of the Chasam Sofer are an empowering perspective for those who have the zechus to live and work in Eretz Yisrael. What may have been just a regular 9-5 job outside of Israel is now transformed into an opportunity for deep connection with Hashem.

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Rav Tzvi Broker is Director of Pilzno Work Inspired, an organization bridging the gap between parnassah and avodas Hashem, under the leadership of Rav Yehoshua Gerzi. Its new night seder program enables men to study the sugyas of Money, Work, Bitachon & Kiddush Hashem and learn practical Avodas to apply daily at work and while making financial decisions. Join us online or in person. For more info or to register email pilznoworkinspired@gmail.com.

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Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of Piaseczna

Rabbi Dov Loketch

Previous installments described the Rebbe's early years, his remarkable combination of talent and personal greatness, his passion for aliyah to the Land of Israel, and his groundbreaking educational vision. This third installment focuses on the Rebbe's relationship with his wife, the tragic loss of his family and the early phase of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Becoming One

Rabbi Dr. Polen describes the special relationship between the Rebbe and his wife:

"Those who knew his family well and who were often present at his home recall the atmosphere of love and respect that prevailed in the household. The mutual devotion and admiration between the Rebbe and his wife ... were evident to all. Like her three sisters, Rachel Chayah Miriam was very learned; she would avidly follow her husband's discourses. In one passage, he notes that his wife reviewed his writings, making comments and posing questions. When she passed away in 1937, he wrote a poignant and moving letter to his Chasidim in Eretz Yisrael eulogizing her. Chasidim recall that after her passing, Rabbi Shapira never again played the violin."

Soon after the Rebbetzin's passing, the Rebbe took one of his close chassidim to a cabinet in his home, opened a

drawer, and took out a piece of paper. He showed the chassid the paper, it was a ma'amar – an essay of Chassidic thought – he had written. Curiously, though, the handwriting suddenly changed in the middle of the essay.

The Rebbe explained that as he was writing this ma'amar, he was called for an important consultation. After he left, his wife finished the essay for him, and he returned to find the perfectly finished product on his desk.

The Rebbe told the chassid that this is the deep meaning of the pasuk in Sefer Bereshis 2:24, which says about the relationship between husband and wife, "They shall become one flesh." The Piaseczna Rebbe and his Rebbetzin forged an especially close bond such that they truly became one, to the extent that the Rebbetzin could complete his essays for him.

Terror From the Skies of Warsaw

Life in Warsaw suddenly turned tragic on September 1, 1939, when the German army invaded Poland, bombarding Warsaw from the air. An estimated 50,000 people died in Warsaw even before the German ground troops occupied the city.

The Rebbe was in Warsaw at the time,



His Chassidim marveled at his extraordinary strength and unbreakable spirit in the face of such tragedy.

and during the first several weeks of bombing, his home on 5 Dzielna St. was spared. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur tefillos with special emotion and fervor were held in his beis midrash. But two days after Yom Kippur, the Germans savagely bombarded the city. A piece of shrapnel flew into the Rebbe's home and struck his beloved son, Elimelech, in the arm. Despite the relentless bombing throughout the city, the Rebbe took his son to the hospital. They went from one hospital to the next, but they were all full and out of necessary supplies. Finally, they reached a Red Cross facility that agreed to admit Elimelech.

Crying and reciting Tehillim, the Rebbe stood at the entrance. He was joined by several family members who remained there late into the night. At one point, the Rebbe left for the home of a doctor, whom he wanted to bring to the hospital.

While he was gone, a bomb fell in the area, killing those who had assembled there, including Elimelech's wife, Gittel Shapira, and his sister-in-law, Chanah Hopstein. The Rebbe, in great pain and anguish, announced, "*G-d has given, and G-d has taken*" (Iyov 1:21), and had the

deceased taken to the cemetery. That Friday night, Shabbos Chol HaMoed Sukkos, right after the Rebbe made Kiddush, Elimelech, who was at his side, succumbed to his wounds and died. Several weeks later, the Rebbe's mother, pained by the tragic death of her grandson, passed away.

Grieving and anguished by the loss of five family members, the Rebbe did not lose his morale. He remained in Warsaw and continued his sacred work of teaching, conducting *tischen*, and writing a sefer. His Chassidim marveled at his extraordinary strength and unbreakable spirit in the face of such tragedy.

The journalist Leib Bein, a close follower of the Rebbe in Warsaw, left for Eretz Yisrael in 1940, and he urged the Rebbe to join him. But the Rebbe refused, unwilling to abandon his surviving relatives and his community.

Rebbe of the Ghetto

During the next year, 450,000 Jews in Warsaw were herded and sealed into a ghetto of less than two square miles. Nobody could enter or leave without receiving a special pass from the German authorities. They suffered from extreme scarcity, and typhus was rampant. Nazi officers regularly humiliated the Jews in the streets, and many were deported to labor camps. Large numbers of Jews died of hunger





BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY



and illness in the ghetto.

The conditions in the ghetto deteriorated, but the Jews believed that the worst of their suffering was behind them and that the situation could only improve. Tragically, this was not the case. In the summer of 1942, deportations to the Treblinka extermination camp began. Every day, 6,000 to 7,000 Jews were herded into cattle cars and shipped to the gas chambers. By January 1943, just 40,000 to 50,000 Jews remained in the ghetto. Some hid in secret bunkers, while others obtained work permits, performing labor for Germany's war effort.

The Rebbe of Piaseczna registered as a laborer in the Shultz shoemaking facility, which became known as The Rebbes' Workshop, because several outstanding rabbanim worked there.

A Jew named Avraham Hendel, who had owned the factory until it was requisitioned by the Nazis, was appointed manager, and he arranged to bring in illustrious Rabbanim as laborers so they could be saved.

Hillel Seidman, a survivor and chronicler of the Warsaw Ghetto, describes in his *Warsaw Ghetto Diaries* the scene he witnessed during a visit to the facility during Sukkos:

"I arrive at the Shultz factory when the assembled "workers" are davening and reciting Hoshanos At one workbench ... sits the Kozielglow Rav ... formerly rosh Yeshiva at Chachmei Lublin. ... Every so often, he throws a question to his neighbor opposite, the [Piaseczner] Rebbe, Rav Klonimus Shapira, author of the Chovas HaTalmidim, and they begin a whispered dialogue in Talmudic study ... The spirits of the Rishonim and Achronim hover above this workbench ... Who worries about the German overseers or the SS? ... They are no longer in a factory at 46 Nowolipie Street, but inside the Temple's Hewn Chamber [Lishchas Ha-Gazis] at a sitting of the Sanhedrin."

With extraordinary strength, emunah and determination, the Rebbe ministered to all Jews in the ghetto who sought religious leadership. He clandestinely performed bris milahs and weddings, arranged for the operation of secret mikvahs and ran a soup kitchen. And, every Shabbos, he delivered an uplifting drasha. These talks combined profound Chassidic teachings with words of encouragement, urging his fellow Jews to maintain their faith and their religious observance amid the horrors they were living through.

The next installment will detail the Rebbe's heroic and tragic leadership during the Warsaw Ghetto years.



Ten Kilos of Blame

Ilana Cowland

It's not surprising that we blame so naturally. Blaming is one of the first things we read about after Hashem creates humanity. It's not a far stretch to call it the first recorded human flaw. So, I'm not blaming us for blaming. I'm just wondering what we can do about it and where it shows up.

To begin with, there's the crass and the obvious. You know: "He did this!" "She did this!" "Who did this?" Then, there's the invisible, which usually takes the plural form. "Why don't they clean the roads more often?" "They should really do something about the cockroaches." Do we mean the council? The government? Or is it just some great imagined group of non-existent elders who we like to think would make our lives easier, if only they would _____ (fill in the blank).

There are the events of our lives. We don't always name these; we just hold them responsible for our misfortune. Whether it's the financial difficulties we were born into, the bad educational

decisions that were made for us, our physical disadvantages or the painful traumas we underwent. Sometimes, we blame them outright and sometimes we don't, but we still see them as the reason we haven't gone as far in life as we might have otherwise.



When the impulse to blame is restrained, power is reclaimed. When we reclaim the power, real changes begin to happen.



And then there's the blame (I might get in trouble here) linked to the wonderful events that we longingly and rightfully anticipate. Like marriage. Or Moshiach. When they get here, everything will be better. I bemoan my life right now as I wait for something to happen. Until it happens, it's not my fault that I'm unhappy. When it does happen, then I'll be happy. So I'll wait for someone or something to rescue me. Yes. Even the necessary, daily anticipation of





Moshiach can be twisted into another exercise in blame.

I imagine blame as a ten-kilo package that must not be dropped. Some people have no problem carrying heavy packages because they're very strong. But, if ten kilos is too heavy for you, you're going to want to pass that package on to someone else.

When I'm feeling strong, I have enough personal credit to weather the blame for something. Yes, it was me. Sorry. Secondly, when I'm feeling strong, I don't have to dump the package on others. When I can't carry the heavy load, I unload it on to others. When I'm strong, I'm able to carry it myself. That's called taking responsibility.

Responsibility is not the same as blame. I'm not blaming myself necessarily; I'm saying I will take on the task of doing something to lighten the load. If my kids left the milk out, maybe I'll make more of a point of teaching them to tidy up

after themselves. If "they" didn't take care of the cockroaches, maybe I'll place a call to city officials. If my parents made bad decisions about my schooling, perhaps I should shift from a mindset of "if only" to a mindset of "what now?" I am choosing to take the rest of my life out of the hands of others and place it back in my own. Even Moshiach. While I wait every day for his coming, perhaps I can also shift the question from when is he coming to what can I do to make it easier for him to come now?

When the impulse to blame is restrained, power is reclaimed. When we reclaim the power, real changes begin to happen.

Responsibility starts with the recognition that we have the ability to respond, One kilo at a time. When we start taking responsibility instead of waiting for someone else to, we find that we have a much better chance of forging the life we truly want.





And the Winner Is...The Story of a Remarkable Raffle

Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

Rabbi Akiva would famously say that the great principle of the Torah, is the mitzvah of *Ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocha*. Loving a fellow Jew. But the famous idea raises questions. Is it really possible to love others as much as we love ourselves? It sounds impossible, beyond our human capabilities. And when we find ourselves lacking in loving others, we often ask ourselves what is stopping us: why is it sometimes so difficult?

Before I share a staggering story, I want to share a beautiful approach opened up to me by Rav Shimon Shkopp in his introduction to his sefer, *Shaarei Yosher*. He explains that it is impossible to actually love another human being as much as we love ourselves. However, what we can do, is *expand our understanding of ourselves*. We are more than ourselves. Let me explain.

When we are born, we can think only of ourselves. As infants, we think of nobody else. But as we grow up, as teenagers, we begin to accept responsibility for others ,too. We get married, have children, and all of a sudden we *have expanded our "I."* We are more than ourselves.

When we start taking responsibility for communities, for many others, we understand the mitzvah. We cannot love others more than we love ourselves, but we can includes others, in how we define ourselves.

This is the mitzvah of *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*! Of course, this is the season of the Omer, during which the disciples of Rabbi Akiva did not stand up to the challenge.

I would like to share a story that I heard this week from my good friend Rabbi Shlomo Farhi *Shlita* a rabbi in New York, who quoted from Rav Fanger *Shlita*. It's a story that warmed my heart.

When soldiers in the IDF complete their army duty, they have a ceremony to celebrate. They cut their metal ID tags, hand in their guns, and leave as regular civilians.

A platoon of 300 soldiers gathered to say goodbye to the army and to each other.

The organizers of the evening (a few of the soldiers) decided that it would be a wonderful idea to make some sort





STORIES THAT INSPIRE



of lottery to add some suspense to the night. Each of the soldiers put 50 shekels into the pot, reaching a total amount of 15,000 shekels. A nice sum of money to win.

A wealthy American uncle of one of the soldiers somehow heard about it in real time and offered to double the pot – 30,000 NIS. The excitement mounted!

As one of the soldiers – let's call him Yossi – sat there, about to write his name on his piece of paper, he looked over his shoulder to see his friend Ezi who had been severely wounded in the army. Yossi started thinking to himself: "If I win this, or anyone else wins this, it will probably be spent going on a trip. But Ezi could really use this extra 30,000 shekels. He probably has no plans, no prospects of getting a regular job." With that, instead of writing his own name as a candidate to win the lottery, Yossi wrote Ezi's name. With the satisfaction of having done the right thing, Yossi strode up to the box and put in his card.

"And the winner is... Ezi !!"

As Ezi's name was called out, the entire room erupted in a cheer. Everyone was so happy that Ezi won, but no-one was happier than our Yossi, who sat there with tremendous satisfaction. "Maybe it was my ticket

It was a miracle that 300 regular human beings became malachim for those few minutes.

that won Ezi's prize for him! Wouldn't that be a miracle. I must find out!"

Yossi stood up a few minutes later and walked over to the box. He opened the card and saw Ezi's name, but not in his writing. He picked up the next card – again Ezi's name in different handwriting. He picked up other cards. All the same.

Every single soldier in the entire platoon had put Ezi's name on their card! The entire lottery was filled with "Ezi cards."

"This is no miracle," Yossi said to himself as he smiled. Of course Ezi won.

But my dear friends, Yossi was wrong. It was a miracle. It was a miracle that 300 regular human beings became Malachim for those few minutes. They were filled with the light of chesed – care and concern for their friend!

Achdus. Caring. Kavod for our friend.
Ve'ahavta le'reacha Kamocho.

Good Shabbos.



Children Fasting on Yom Kippur

Josh and Tammy Kruger

The Story

"I love Yom Kippur" Daniel informed his third-grade classmates, "I get to eat all the treats I want while my brother and sisters are all fasting. It's good to be the youngest."

"You shouldn't be all excited about Yom Kippur," said his friend Natan. "And I don't think that you should be eating candies when everyone is fasting!"

"Yeah," agreed Eitan, "It's a day to fast and daven, not celebrate"

"I'm gonna try to fast the whole Yom Kippur this year" announced Natan. "Or at least as much as I can." Natan looked at the chocolate bar in his hand, "Dear chocolate bar, we will have a little time away from each other, but I promise I'll be back after the fast."

Eitan smiled, "We're only 8 years old. I don't feel ready to do a whole fast but I want to practice. I'm going to try and have only two meals and no snacks. Let's ask Rabbi Cohen what he thinks."

The Discussion

Q: What is the connection between our story and the parasha?

A: Parashas Acharei teaches the laws of Yom Kippur, including the requirement to fast (Yoma 74b on Vayikra 16:29).

Q: Which of the boys is right?

A: Surprisingly, Daniel is right! While it is certainly encouraged for children



PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

to practice fasting on Yom Kippur before their bar or bas mitzvah, it is forbidden for a child to do any kind of fasting until they turn nine. They are only allowed to perform a complete fast at age 11 (*Shulchan Aruch* 616:2). This means that even trying to eat breakfast and lunch a bit later is not permitted for the boys who are 8 years old.

Q: Why is it alright for a child to eat treats on Yom Kippur?

A: Rav Nissim Karelitz (*Chut Shani*, Vol. 4, Chap. 95) writes that this is permitted. It is important to remember that Yom Kippur is a Yom Tov and a joyous day. We believe that Hashem will forgive our sins. It is a day that should be celebrated, and it is appropriate to give children treats for this reason.

Note that Rav Moshe Sternbuch (*Teshuvos VeHanhagos* Vol. 5, No. 188) writes that one should not give candies to children on Yom Kippur. His reasoning is that although it is permitted for children to eat, it is only because they need to eat. The permission does not include treats. The general custom is to be lenient in the matter.

Back to Our Story

Rav Cohen sat down with the boys and explained to them the rules about Yom Kippur for those under the age of bar mitzvah. Although the boys were a little disappointed to find out that they weren't allowed to fast, secretly Natan was a bit relieved to hear that he wouldn't have to be separated from his chocolate bar – even for one day.

Written in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer; le'ilui neshama of Frumit Bat Yosef, Edith Nusbaum a"h.