

Kehillah #33



THE PERTINENT PARASHA

No Pain, No Gain?

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer | Rav of Kehillat Ohr Chadash, Ramot, Jerusalem

In parashas Re'eh, the Torah gives an original reason for the prohibition against idolatry: “[...] for everything that is an abomination of Hashem, that He hates, have they done to their gods; for even their sons and their daughters have they burned in the fire for their gods” (*Devarim* 12:31).

Hashem does not merely instruct us to choose Him over other gods. He urges us to choose a different conception of the Divine: that of ultimate goodness.

The prohibition against idolatry occurs countless times in the Torah. At Sinai, the second of the Ten Commandments states that “You shall not have other gods upon My countenance.” Idolatry is a betrayal of Hashem. In several places, such as in the case of the Moabite daughters, it

is labeled as an act of *zenus*, simple adultery. What does the extra reason of our parasha add?

The central lesson of the pasuk is that our rejection of idolatry is not merely a preference of one “address” over another – that of Hashem over that of other gods. Rather, the difference is one of kind. Service of Hashem is essentially different from that of all other gods. Hashem does not merely instruct us to choose Him over other gods, for He took us from Mitzrayim. He urges us to choose a different conception of the Divine: that of ultimate goodness.

As earlier pesukim describe, our service of Hashem is one of closeness and joy: “and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your God, in your every undertaking” (12:18). Hashem’s deepest desire is that He should dwell among us and we should bask in his closeness. His service is defined in terms of relationship, while that of idolatry is *avodah zarah*, a service of estrangement.





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The pasuk thus tells us that we must avoid idolatry not just because it betrays Hashem, but because it contravenes the ultimate goodness that Hashem represents – “for even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire for their gods.” The Torah urges us to flee from idolatry because worship of powers outside of Hashem’s ultimate goodness leads inevitably to the worst of deprivations. From the Torah perspective, this is anathema.

Hashem’s revelation to His people, from the moment of our redemption from Egypt to this day, is a revelation of Divine love and the infinite blessing that goes with it.

Some have adopted the proverb “no pain, no gain,” used as an exercise motto that promises greater reward for the price of painful work, into the system of Torah observance. In the Hebrew vernacular, those who endorse this concept are referred to as *tzulnikim* (from the acrostic *tzaddik ve’ra lo*). But while most will not wish to be labeled *tzulnik*, the idea that true service of Hashem requires suffering has taken root among many. If we’re not suffering, we’re missing

something.

Nothing is further from the truth. The excruciating pain of child sacrifice is abominable before Hashem, and nor does He desire lesser forms of suffering. Moreover, countless *pesukim* state that suffering indicates Hashem’s distance, while taking pleasure in earthly bounty indicates His closeness. When we enjoy the sweetness of the world, we experience Hashem’s goodness: “Taste and behold that Hashem is good” (*Tehillim* 34:9).

Hashem’s revelation to His people, from the moment of our redemption from Egypt to this day, is a revelation of Divine love and the infinite blessing that goes with it. As with all relationships, our connection to Hashem sometimes demands sacrifice. Love can be tough love, too. But this does not mean, Heaven forbid, that to Hashem suffering is good and desirable. Hashem’s fundamental will is life – “life is His will” (*Tehillim* 30:6) – and anything that negates life is bad, deleterious, undesirable.

The Torah urges us to choose the goodness of life: “And you shall choose life, in order that you shall live” (*Devarim* 30:19). Together, we choose to live a life of goodness under Hashem; may He show us His countenance and grant us the wondrous joy of His presence.



Doing Chesed Does Us Good

Rabbi Dr. Avidan Milevsky

Psychologist and Director of The Consortium for Research on Aliyah, Ariel University

Economist Jeffrey Sachs argues in his book *The End of Poverty* that extreme poverty can be eliminated globally by the year 2025. This claim may be based on the pasuk in our parasha (*Re'eh* 15:4): "Behold, may there be no destitute among you."

However, just a few pesukim later the Torah seems to challenge this utopian ideal by declaring: "For the destitute will not cease to exist within the land." Several approaches have been suggested to settle this seeming contradiction. I would like to briefly offer three directions from different perspectives: (1) public policy, (2) personal, and (3) spiritual.

These two pesukim have been used in the public policy debate to support both extremes of the political divide. First, the Jewish-Lithuanian Socialist political theorist Nachman Syrkin wrote more than 100 years ago: "It was this people who said thousands of years ago, 'Behold, may there be no destitute among you' and established social laws such as Yovel, Shemittah, Leket, and Pe'ah so that justice would reign in the world. The Jewish people carry in their souls throughout their days of

exile the holy ideal of a true world full of freedom and love and hope for its fulfillment in the days of the Messiah... this new true world will be fulfilled."

On the other hand, Dr. Andrew Schein, an Israeli economist explains that the pasuk, "Behold, may there be no destitute among you" describes the abolishment of absolute poverty, which is attainable. Whereas the pasuk, "For the destitute will not cease to exist within the land" speaks to relative poverty, which will always exist. As he writes:

We engage in chesed not to eradicate the need, but rather the need exists in order for us to do chesed.

"Thus the vision of *Devarim* Perek 15 with regard to poverty is a potential world where relative poverty exists but not absolute poverty. This vision is in harmony with the capitalist system, which promotes





TORAH INSIGHT FOR THE WEEK

economic growth but does not aim for absolute equality."

More importantly, there is a personal development lesson in these pesukim. Rav Shlomo Kluger, who was a rav in Vienna before the war, explains that the message behind these pesukim is for our own self-development. When a person faces challenges, he should engage in introspection: "What have I done wrong to deserve such misfortune." However, when we see the suffering of others, although it may be natural to do the same and find reasons for why this misfortune occurred to him ("Just get a job."), we must not allow such thinking.

As Rav Kluger writes, "This is an obscene character trait and an ugly way to accept the pain, sorrow, and distress of others." It is by G-d's design that "the destitute will not cease to exist within the land." It is not up to us to understand reason or fault; we respond to suffering with chesed.

A final message in these pesukim speaks to the benefit we derive from engaging in chesed. The reason "the destitute will not cease to exist within the land" is because having the needy offers us an opportunity to do good and to better ourselves. We engage in

chesed not to eradicate the need, but rather the need exists in order for us to do chesed. As the pasuk in *Tehillim* informs us, "The world is built on chesed." The *Zohar* in *VaYera* writes: "When G-d loves a person, he sends him a gift. And what is this gift: a needy person – so that he should gain merit. If he merits, G-d wraps him with a string of chesed." Doing chesed does us good.

In a study published in the journal *Science*, two groups of participants rated their level of happiness in the morning and were then given an envelope with money. They were instructed to spend the money by 5 pm that day. However, one group was told to spend the money on themselves whereas the second group was asked to spend the money on others. At the end of the day, the participants in the prosocial spending condition reported greater happiness than did the participants in the personal spending condition. Spending money on others promoted happiness more than spending money on oneself.

Opportunities for chesed will always exist to better our own lives.



Taking Interest

The Relevance of Taking Ribbis in Israel

Rabbi Shloimy Muller

Talmid of Rav Pinchas Vind shlita, founder of the Beis Horaah L'Inyanei Ribbis

When Jews move to Israel, they're privileged to begin keeping more mitzvos. The most obvious one is yishuv Eretz Yisrael, but the list also includes shemittah and other mitzvos such as terumos and ma'asros.

There is yet another mitzvah – one that is usually overlooked – that comes up in Israel, although its violation is more serious than any of the above. While it isn't intrinsically connected to Israel, on a practical level, it's far more relevant here than in the Diaspora. I refer to the issur of ribbis, the prohibition of interest.

The issur of ribbis applies only to transactions that occur between two Jews. Therefore, outside of Israel, it doesn't come up so often. However, in Israel, barely a day goes by without encountering a potential issur ribbis.

Every bank account holder can potentially be violating ribbis. Taking a mortgage or bank loan? That's potential ribbis. Electric, water and gas bills paid late accrue interest, which is ribbis. Every legal employee in Israel has a pension fund; unless he or she specifically requests otherwise, the money may end up in a fund that is in violation of ribbis.

Every child under eighteen has money set aside for him or her in an automatic fund set up by Bituach Leumi, many of which aren't ribbis free. Even the simple act of lending foreign currency, whether dollars, pounds, or euros, can often involve a violation of ribbis d'rabbanan.

The issur of ribbis is unique in its severity. It is the only issur whose violation precludes the transgressor from techiyas hamaysim (*Shemos Raba* 31:6). And the contrast is true as well. The Torah promises, "Do not bite [a reference to ribbis] your brother so that Hashem will bless you in all your endeavors in Eretz Yisrael." (*Devarim* 23: 21) One who is vigilant in this mitzvah merits success in this world as in the next.

The Torah requires a Jew to lend money to his Jewish brother without using the opportunity to extort more money. And this issur isn't the sole domain of the lender; the borrower is prohibited to borrow with ribbis as well.

We who merit to live in Israel must take extra care to avoid lending or borrowing with ribbis. In the coming weeks we will discuss various common scenarios and how to prevent transgressing this prohibition.





MEKOM AVODA

Workplace Ethics & Halacha

Remission of Debts and Its Limitations

Rabbi Asher Meir | Torah and Policy Researcher

Our parasha details the mitzvah of remission of debts in the shemittah year (*Devarim* 15:1-6). The verses seem to describe this mitzvah as a sweeping cancellation of all debts, but Chazal both discerned and instituted many limitations on this remission.

The essence of the Torah mitzvah of shemittas kesafim is that when the shemittah year ends, all debts that were due before the subsequent Rosh

a script for such a return (10:8:) The borrower offers to repay the loan; the lender reassures him “I remit my loans”; the borrower insists, “Even so”; then it is permissible and even desirable for the lender to accept the payment.

The Yerushalmi (*Sheviis* 10:3) goes further and indicates that the lender may assertively, though wordlessly, express his desire for the borrower to adhere to the script and return the money. This ruling is noted by Poskim, who differ somewhat as to how assertive the lender may be, though all agree he may be proactive (*Beis Yosef* CM 67:36; *Igros Moshe* CM II 15).

How do we reconcile the Torah’s sweeping release with the much more circumscribed conditions for release we find in Chazal and the Poskim? An interesting explanation is found in Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook’s aggadic commentary, *Ein Ayah* (*Sheviis* 9:8). Rav Kook suggests that the principle behind the release is that a debt is never just a debt. Every loan is also a kind of servitude in miniature. He quotes the verse in

The lender may assertively, though wordlessly, express his desire for the borrower to adhere to the script and return the money.

Hashanah but were not collected are erased. The lender no longer has the legal authority to collect his debt.

However, the Mishnah in *Sheviis* indicates that things are not so simple. The Mishnah states (*Sheviis* 10:9) that the Sages look favorably upon somebody who returns a debt after the date of shemittah. They even provide





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Mishlei (22:7), “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.” Rav Kook identifies this servitude primarily with the feeling of subordination felt by the borrower; we could also mention

direct consequence of our collective servitude to Hashem. The *Sifra* (*Behar* 7:1) says that if someone tries to enslave a Jew, Hashem preempts the attempt by asserting: “My title is prior!” When these values come into conflict, the value of freedom must prevail.

The factor of personal subordination among Jews has been neutralized, and all that’s left is the simple monetary obligation.

It is noteworthy, in this context, that Torah passages relating to limitations on lenders are often adjacent to passages regarding servitude. One example is in our parasha, where the passage relating to shemittah and tzedakah is immediately followed by the mitzvah to free a Hebrew servant after six years, parallel to the six years during which loans can be collected from debtors.

the purely halachic facet of personal subordination (*shiabud haguf*) involved in any Torah loan.

However, although servitude and monetary debt are generally coupled, sometimes it is possible to decouple the two. When the lender sincerely reassures the borrower, “I remit my debts” in accordance with Torah law, the feeling of subordination disappears. The factor of personal subordination among Jews has been neutralized, and all that’s left is the simple monetary obligation. In such cases, it is proper, and for all intents and purposes obligatory, to pay the debt if one is able.

Yet, we also know that the Torah frowns on servitude among Jews. Jews can never own Jewish slaves; Jewish indentured servitude is limited in time (to six years, like shemittah) and in the scope of subordination. So we have a conundrum: the halacha acknowledges the requirement to pay monetary obligations of all kinds, including loans. But the halacha also places supreme value on our freedom as Jews from servitude to other human beings, which is a

This approach outlined by Rav



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Kook can explain not only *devar hashemittah* (fulfilling the release through words), but also some other leniencies on the Torah restrictions on lenders. For instance, the *pruzbul* involves transferring one's power of collection to *beis din*. There is nothing demeaning in being subordinate to the *beis din*, to the public as a whole; hence it makes sense that these debts may be collected.

This could also apply to *heter iska*. Collecting interest is a fundamentally fair monetary recompense for allowing someone else to use the money, yet it can also be seen as a way of exploiting the servitude of the lender (*Likutei Halachos* (Breslav), *Yoreh Deah Ribbis* 1). *Heter iska* works by recasting a loan agreement, in which the lender is empowered and the borrower is subordinated, as a partnership agreement in which the parties are equal. Hence, the sting of the servitude is neutralized and paying the monetary recompense is legitimated.

Shemitas kesafim is one example of many in which the non-Jewish world drew inspiration in enlightened policy measures from the Torah. The

liberal US bankruptcy regime, meant to guarantee problem debtors a fresh start, primarily dates to an 1898 statute. However, there were previous bills that provided emergency relief to debtors. These were sometimes characterized as "debt jubilees," commemorating the Yovel that canceled servitude, as well as coinciding with the fresh start of debt release at the end of the adjacent *Shemittah* year.

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“Living in the Land”: How Charedi Aliyah Can Work

Charedi Judaism, it is often said, is predicated on the religious disposition of the *Chasam Sofer*: *chadash assur min ha-Torah* (innovations are prohibited). This raises a thorny question concerning Charedi Jews who choose to continue living outside of Israel.

The *Chasam Sofer* writes that the earth of *Eretz Yisrael* is holier than the skies of *chutz la'aretz*, and that the main fulfillment of all mitzvos is specific to the Land. Moreover, he famously extolls the virtues of working in the Land of Israel, explaining that studying and engaging in any trade is part of the Mitzvah of settling the Land. How, then, can so many Charedi Jews remain outside of Israel?

In his recent book, *Living in the Land*, Rabbi Yoel Berman suggests (by implication) that the answer is more technical than theological. People don't move because of the language, because of seemingly insurmountable cultural barriers, or because of concerns over *parnassah*, finding the right schools, or broader *chinuch* concerns.

In order to alleviate such concerns, Rabbi Yoel Berman has published a wonderful resource entitled “Living in the Land,” in which he culls a wealth of short Aliyah stories penned by a broad range of yeshivish/Charedi families. The stories serve two

basic purposes: 1. To alleviate Aliyah concerns; 2. To showcase a range of chutznik communities and the many ways in which Aliyah can take shape.

In both matters, the book excels. Anybody thinking of Aliyah will be able to find like minded families that have taken the step and made the bold move to Israel, navigating the difference issues – *chinuch*, *parnassah*, culture, language, geography, distance from family, balancing working and learning – in a range of different communities and by means of different approaches.

Some contributors suffice by telling their story. Others weigh in with words of advice: make sure you speak English at home; don't disparage schools even when you disagree with their approach; don't outsource your responsibility to others – and so on. Some are inspirational. The common denominator is that they are down to earth. Beyond occasional mention of Israel's *mekomos hakedoshim* and the like, none wax overly ideological.

Some might see this as a weakness of the book, but I think it's a strength. For ideology, the reader can read *Eim Habanim Semeichah* or other works delineating the virtues and ideology of Aliyah. For how it can work in the Charedi context, *Living in the Land* is a must read.



BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

Sarah Schenirer – The Founder of Bais Yaakov

Rabbi Dov Loketch | Rabbi of Agudas Yisrael Mogen Avraham, Detroit

Last week we read about the success of the first Bais Yaakov school. This week we will learn about the Meteoric Growth of the Bais Yaakov movement.

This revolutionary endeavor was wildly successful. The school quickly grew to 280 students, far too many to be accommodated by Sarah's original two-room apartment. Additional rooms were rented to add more space, but there was also an additional problem, more teachers were needed for the rapidly growing student body. Sarah said about the situation, "Things are out of control." So out of control, in fact, that she turned to her best students—some as young as thirteen—to serve as teachers. Help arrived in 1919, when Agudas Yisrael opened a branch in Krakow. Rabbi Luksenberg appealed to the organization to help the new institution, and the Agudah, recognizing the unique importance of this school, agreed to assume responsibility for its finances. "Frau Schenirer", as Sarah was now called, consulted at this time with the Bover Rebbe, who lent his full support to the project. With the Agudah's backing and support, Frau Schenirer was now able to take the next step, transforming her school into a movement.

News of her school's phenomenal success spread far and wide, and communities in other Polish cities expressed interest in opening Bais Yaakov schools. And Frau Schenirer

personally traveled to remote, outlying towns appealing to the Jewish communities to open schools. The newer schools were, at first, staffed by graduates of the original Krakow branch, some of whom were just fifteen or sixteen years old. Eventually Frau Schenirer launched a teachers' training program, a seminary, to meet the ever-demand for qualified, motivated, and devoted teachers.

The next major jolt propelling the Bais Yaakov movement forward came in 1923, when the World Congress of Agudas Yisrael convened in Vienna and established the Keren HaTorah Foundation to oversee all Jewish education in Europe. This included the Bais Yaakov network, which by then served 1,040 students in seven schools, some with fulltime programs, and some offering only afternoon programs. The Foundation's head, Rabbi Dr. Leo Deutschlander, a staunch devotee of Rav Hirsch's teachings, became directly involved in the Bais Yaakov system. While Frau Schenirer continued to serve as the motherly, charismatic leader and figurehead, Rabbi Deutschlander emerged as the capable director overseeing the technical and financial aspects of the network. We might say that Frau





BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

Schenirer was the “Neshamah” (“soul”) of Bais Yaakov, and Rabbi Deutschlander was its “Guf” (“body”), providing the logistical framework for the school’s operations.

On his first visit to the Teachers’ Seminary in Krakow in 1924, Rabbi Deutschlander was appalled by the cramped, dilapidated conditions of the two-room apartment where the approximately fifty girls learned. Yet, the girls themselves—none older than sixteen—were oblivious to the uncomfortable living conditions. Their minds were focused on the angelic figure of Frau Schenirer, inspired by the special aura of serenity and sanctity that she projected, and were overcome by the excitement of serious Torah learning and their future as teachers of Klal Yisrael. Nevertheless, Rabbi Deutschlander arranged for a much larger, fully-equipped, eight-room facility with classrooms and dormitories, on 30 Augustrianska Street.

The network continued growing exponentially, and by 1925, it consisted of forty-nine schools and served 6,585 students. And by 1927, the movement included eighty-two schools serving 11,547 children. The movement launched its own publication, the Bais Yaakov Journal, which brought together all the many different branches. As the movement expanded, it founded the Bnos Youth Organization, the Basya program for younger girls, “Hachsharah” programs for girls

interested in Aliyah, and summer camps. These programs all featured their own slogans, mottos, songs, plays, and even special holidays

In 1927, Rabbi Deutschlander and the Agudah decided that the time had come for the Krakow Seminary to have its own building. In September of that year, a cornerstone-laying ceremony was held, celebrating what would become a new, five-story edifice at 10 Stanislawa, overlooking the beautiful Vistula River. The historic event was graced by the presence of all the prominent Rabbanim, political figures and lay leaders of Krakow, who sat at the dais. Frau Schenirer, however, didn’t sit there. She preferred sitting with her girls, characteristic of her exceptional Tzenius, humility, and boundless love for her students.

Four years later, in 1931, the school moved into the new facility, which became home to one hundred and fifty seminarians. This building still stands today, and I was privileged to visit the site around ten years ago on a Jewish Heritage Tour run by Dr. Shnayer Leiman. During those four years, the movement continued its meteoric growth, and by 1931 it numbered 197 schools serving 27,741 students. Brilliant and talented educators were hired to teach at the teachers’ training program in Krakow, among the most notable of which was Dr. Judith Rosenbaum, a graduate of the Realschule in Frankfurt and Frankfurt University, who later married the renowned Dayan Yeshayah Grunfeld.



Who's Wall?

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships Coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*

I was handling a sensitive situation. This is not an uncommon situation in the life of someone who works with people. People need to be handled

just slightly.

"What?" I inquired?

"Oh, nothing," he responded.

"It's not nothing. I know that ever so slight smile of yours. What is it?"

And then my supervisor, or husband as he's better known, did something extremely annoying.

"Well," he said, the ever so slight smile creeping to his voice, "it's just that it's not this person's wall that's the issue. It's your wall."

with care. What was unusual here was that I had misdiagnosed where the sensitivity lay. It was actually with me.

Hmmmm. It took me a moment to gather my rebuttal. Do you honestly think that this person doesn't have a wall?"

As I was preparing a strategy in my mind I thought it might be best to discuss it with my supervisor. I have incredible access to my supervisor. I guess that's one of the advantages of being married to him.

"Oh, no. This person definitely has a huge wall. I'm not saying otherwise. It's just that the problem you're experiencing in handling this situation has got nothing to do with this person's wall. The problem is your wall."

As I shared the brief and the strategy, I concluded by saying that this is a difficult situation because I have to be careful about the person's wall. And then my supervisor, or husband as he's better known, did something extremely annoying. He smiled, but

And, of course, he was correct. My empathic response to sensing a wall was to create one in turn. This is how it works. I may sense that a person has a very hard time receiving compliments. That might





ERP EDUCATION, RELATIONSHIPS, PARENTING

be their wall. But when I find myself hesitating in giving this person a compliment, it's not because this person has a hard time receiving them but because I'm now having a hard time giving them. I have now created a wall, a sentiment that acts like a wall. For me to achieve what I want to achieve, I feel like I have to push through something or climb over something. There's a blockage between myself and the behavior or activity I seek to demonstrate or engage in.

I'm on a dance floor, and I would like to dance. But I can't. I may tell myself that I can't dance freely because of the people watching. That's almost true. Actually, I can't dance freely because of my consciousness of the people who may be, but probably aren't, watching. This is my wall.

It has nothing to do with them. But what really got me thinking was, if we can mistake our walls for the walls of other people, what else do we mistake? How many times do our selfish motivations sneakily disguise themselves as having to do with those whom we love?

The mother who won't send her son to a boarding school for fear that he won't cope. That he won't cope or that she won't cope? Whose fear is this?

The father who holds back on telling his child the truth in order to protect their sensitivities. Whose sensitivities are being protected here? The child's or the parent's?

The parents who rescue their children from struggling because it's too much for the child to deal with? Or perhaps watching their child struggle is too much for them to deal with?

There's nothing wrong with it being our fear, our wall, our reluctance,

The problem is that when we pretend that our issues are actually the issues of somebody else, our judgment is clouded.

or our sensitivity. We have those, too. The problem is that when we pretend that our issues are actually the issues of somebody else, our judgment is clouded.

Once we have the self-awareness to diagnose whose walls we are dealing with, we will be far better positioned to respond in the way that the other person needs us to respond.



The Prohibition of Destroying G-d's Name

Josh and Tammy Kruger

The Story

It had been a great morning at Joseph's sleep-away camp. Chocolate milk for breakfast, water skiing, and archery. As he returned to his cabin, his counselor passed him an envelope that had just arrived in the mail. Joseph looked at the return address on the envelope and saw that his grandfather had written it.

He excitedly opened it and saw his grandfather's trademark comments. Sometimes the letter that Joseph received from his grandfather was actually a letter that Joseph had written himself! In order to teach his grandson, Joseph's grandfather would often mark it like a teacher – but without a grade, of course. There would be circles drawn around the spelling mistakes, smiley faces drawn by parts written well, *LOL* written near comments that were particularly funny, and short answers to the questions that Joseph had asked in his letter. Joseph enjoyed getting these letters because he felt as if he was having a conversation with his grandfather!

Joseph scanned through the letter

and saw a red arrow pointing to a space near the "Dear Zaidy" part of his letter. There was a question mark and *BH* written in. Joseph was confused by this and showed it to his bunkmate. "What's the problem here?" he asked David. Did I forget to write something?"

His friend looked at it and explained to Joseph what it meant. "*BH* means B'ezras Hashem. By starting your letter with a *BH*, you are showing respect to G-d."

Joseph giggled. "Hmmm, maybe I'll respond that I didn't want to put Hashem's name on it because then I'd have to put the letter in shaimos afterwards!" He scribbled down this excuse on the letter he was going to send back to his grandfather.

"Maybe you're right," said his friend. "Maybe the letter would need to be put in a *shaimos* box."

Discussion

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

A: In *Parshas Re'eh*, the Jewish People are commanded to destroy all idols and to destroy the names of those





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idols as well (*Devarim* 12:4). The next *pasuk* states, "You shall not do so to Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim* 12:4). This means that we are forbidden to destroy (erase) the name of G-d (*Sifri, Devarim* 61; *Makkos* 22a).

Q: What is a *shaimos* box?

A: G-d's name cannot be destroyed and must be treated with respect. If G-d's name is written on a piece of paper then we cannot throw it into the garbage. We place it into a special box, called a *shaimos* box. When the box is full, the paper inside is buried in the ground in a respectful way.

Q: Where did the tradition of honoring G-d in our letters come from?

A: During the time of Chanukah, the Greeks made a rule that the Jews were not allowed even to mention the name of G-d. The Hasmoneans were very upset about this and made a rule that every letter that the Jews wrote should have the name of G-d (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b).

Q: Does the halacha require us to still include G-d's name in our letters?

A: No. The chachamim at the time of the Hasmoneans were not happy about this rule. They worried that it

would lead to the letters with G-d's name being placed in the garbage. So the chachamim canceled the Hasmoneans' rule (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b). When Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked about this issue, he answered that if the letter does not relate to a topic of kedusha, then there is no good reason to add G-d's name (*Iggros Moshe, Vol. 2, Yoreh De'ah, No. 138*).

Q: Would Joseph have to put the letter in a *shaimos* box if it BH was written on it?

A: If the BH was written in Hebrew (Beis Hei) then there might be an issue involved, depending on what we mean when we write the letter Hei in the Beis Hei:

If the intention of the Hei is an abbreviation of the word Hashem, it follows that the letters have no kedusha. The word Hashem is not holy; it just means The Name. There is no problem throwing out or destroying a paper that has the words The Name on it (though the reference is to the Name of Hashem). Likewise, there is no problem destroying a piece of paper that has the word Hashem written on it.

So why would it be a problem if *Beis Hei* is written on the letter? Because

