

Kehillah #36



THE PERTINENT PARASHA

Mutuality in Mitzvah Performance

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

“You have distinguished Hashem today to be a God for you, and to walk in His ways, and to observe His decrees, His commandments, and His statues, and to hearken to His voice. And Hashem has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people, as He spoke to you, and to observe all His commandments” (*Devarim* 26:17-18).

others gods and powers, and Hashem selects us to be His cherished people. This mutuality singles out Hashem from other gods: our connection with Him involves relationship rather than transaction, covenant rather than contract. It is inherently mutual.

Remarkably, both sides of the equation note the same action: mitzvah performance. Hashem treasures us and gives us his commandments; and we choose Hashem, and therefore keep the same mitzvos. This raises a difficulty. Every relationship involves giving and receiving, yet one party generally does something for the other party – makes a cup of coffee, buys a gift, writes a letter – which reinforces the connection. In the case of mitzvos, who is acting on behalf of whom? Is Hashem doing this for us or are we doing this for Hashem?

Hashem treasures us and gives us his commandments; and we choose Hashem, and therefore keep the same mitzvos.

Beyond any other Torah *pesukim*, these verses describe the mutuality between Hashem and the Jewish People. We recognize Hashem as our God, choosing Him and negating

Certainly, the mitzvos are for our benefit. They give us life, as Chazal note in *Avos*, in this world and in the next world. This idea is noted explicitly in the Torah: “You shall keep my laws and my ordinances that a



THE PERTINENT PARASHA



man shall perform them and live by them" (*Vayikra* 18:5). The Rambam thus writes that the mitzvot define a good life: they ensure our ways are just (*Temurah* 4:13), and they establish a good human society (*Yesodos HaTorah* 4:13).

Moreover, the mitzvot sanctify and elevate us. They allow us to experience

Hashem's deepest desire is that His goodness should be revealed in the world. He is the source of all goodness, and His will is that this goodness should be manifest in the world.

closeness to Hashem even as we live our earthly human existence, and to light up every corner of our life and world with the light of Hashem. Hashem chose us and gave us this tremendous gift.

On the other hand, we also choose Hashem by keeping the mitzvot. Mitzvah performance isn't just a gift. It is also a duty – our duty to observe His decrees and ordinances, which we do, as it were, for Him. As Rashi notes concerning the performance of sacrificial order, Hashem is satisfied in that He spoke and His will was

performed (*Shemos* 29:18).

Yet, perhaps there is a deeper layer of mutuality here. Hashem's deepest desire is that His goodness should be revealed in the world. He is the source of all goodness, and His will is that this goodness should be manifest in the world. "His will is life" (*Tehillim* 30:6). Avraham Avinu is thus selected because he will instruct his offspring to "keep the way of Hashem in performance justice and charity" (*Bereishis* 18:19).

The mitzvot are thus for our benefit, for our good, and the realization of this goodness is itself the ultimate Divine will. Like Adam in Gan Eden, who was instructed by Hashem to work and guard the Garden, so the mitzvot are for our benefit, and this benefit is Hashem's desire. The goodness is the ultimate connection between Hashem and us.

On the deepest level, the principle holds even for human relationships. When a husband buys his wife a gift, *the gift is for both of them*. He revels in her pleasure, and this mutual joy is a consummation of the relationship.

This is a profound lesson in mitzvah performance. We keep the mitzvot for our good, and our good is Hashem's greatest will. We just need to make sure we keep Him in the picture. Always.



How Does Moving Boundary Lines Thwart Justice?

Rabbi Asher Meir | Torah and Policy Researcher

Our parasha opens with the twelve imprecations to be accepted by the people on Mount Eival. The second one is a curse on one who “pushes back his neighbor’s boundary.” The prohibition on *hasagas gevul* was learned in *Parashas Shoftim* (*Devarim* 19:14), “Don’t push back the boundary of your neighbor, which was delimited by your predecessors.”

Rashi on *Shoftim* cites the Sifri, which points out that we already know that stealing is forbidden and infers that this

Justice can only exist in the presence of a collective commitment to justice.

verse adds a prohibition specifically on stealing land in the Land of Israel. This Sifri generated an extensive halachic discussion among the Rishonim and the Acharonim because it seems to contradict the *beraita* that makes land an exception to many laws relating to stealing (*Bava Kama* 117b), and especially

to contradict the principle that “land cannot be stolen” (*Bava Kama* 95a, *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mispat* 139:2).

The essence of stealing is taking something into your possession, but land can’t be “taken” because it is immovable. “Stealing” land would seem to be a combination of obstructing the neighbor from using it – which would merely be indirectly causing a loss – and using the land yourself – which would generally involve stealing produce or something else from the land (*Shut Rosh* 95). Later commentators discuss if using the land could also be considered borrowing without permission, also considered a kind of stealing (*Bava Metziah* 41, *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat*. 292:1; *Chazon Ish Sukkah* 150:22, *Haamek Davar Shemos* 20:14).

No Contradiction

However, the Rambam (*Geneiva* 7:11, *Gezeila* 8:1) and many other Rishonim don’t see any contradiction. The Torah prohibition on stealing is broad and categorical, even as any particular law relating to stealing – amount of recompense, mitzvah status, etc. – may not apply in every case.

Even granting that stealing land is





MEKOM AVODA

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included in the prohibition, we still have to define when “stealing” has taken place. As the Rambam points out (*Gezeila* 8:14), “land can never be acquired by a thief, since it remains in the possession of the owner.” The Rambam in *Mishneh Torah* doesn’t clarify the issue, mentioning only “inserting his neighbor’s border into his own” (*Geneiva* 7:11). However, in the *Sefer haMitzvos* he gives a much more precise definition: “to the extent that it is possible to claim [*yad’i*] that someone else’s land is his” (*Lo Taaseh* 246).

The Rambam understands that the wording of the Torah is precise. The transgression is precisely to move the boundary marker. The transgressor hasn’t excluded the rightful owner; he hasn’t made use of the land himself; he doesn’t even claim that the land belongs to him! All he did was move a rock or a post. If the land is ever surveyed or sold, the legal authorities will consider the property to belong to the transgressor. The prohibition is not to steal the land; it is to steal the legal right to use the land.

Undermining Society’s Foundations

According to the Rambam, this prohibition fits perfectly with the other imprecations. The transgressions mentioned in the *klalos* are not the most severe ones,

but rather the ones that undermine the foundations of society. The first of these is someone who secretly acknowledges *avodah zarah* since recognizing Hashem as the sole authority in human affairs is the entire basis of Jewish communal life. Second is someone who belittles his parents, since as Jews our connection with Hashem is not new to us but rather part of a tradition transmitted through the generations. Other curses that fit this pattern are perverting justice for the weak and judges accepting bribes.

Stealing is a regrettable act of injustice, which the legal system will work, imperfectly, to rectify. But *hasagas gevul* as the Rambam understands it thwarts the system of justice, which can now be perversely recruited for the benefit of the transgressor. Justice can only exist in the presence of a collective commitment to justice.

The Mishnah (*Sota* 32a) counts these imprecations among the declarations that can be made only in the original Biblical Hebrew. The Gemara explains that immediately following the ceremony of the blessings and curses, the entire Torah was written on whitened stones in seventy languages; only then could the people retire for the day. The impression is that these two ceremonies are intimately connected.



MEKOM AVODA Workplace Ethics & Halacha



It seems that the universal message of Torah to mankind does not reside primarily in the words of the Torah. These words have significance only when the Jewish people internalizes the underlying basis of a Torah society. Only then can we realize these principles ourselves and project them outwards.

The Jewish people must understand that a flourishing society must be based on the collective acknowledgment of Hashem's sovereignty, and on reverence for tradition and commitment to the principles of justice. It is then the words of the Torah are filled with life and can carry their message to other nations near and far.



PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

Reducing Financial Stress

Rabbi Tzvi Broker | Career Coach and Director of Pilzno Work Inspired

For many of us, online banking has become the modern way of counting our money. When budgeting, spreadsheets do the calculations for us. This week's parasha gives insight into the Jewish way to count what we have. We read, "Hashem will command blessing with you in your storehouses and in every one of your endeavors, and He will bless you in the land which Hashem, your G-d, is giving you (*Devarim* 28:8)

On this, the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 42a) expounds: "And Rebbe Yitzchak says: Blessing is found only in a matter concealed from the eye, as it is stated: "Hashem will command blessing with you in your storehouses"

(*Devarim* 28:8), where the grain is concealed...The Chachamim taught: One who goes to measure the grain on his threshing floor recites: May it be Your will, Hashem, our God, that You send blessing upon the product of our hands. If one began to measure the grain he says: Blessed is He Who sends blessing upon this pile of grain. If one measured and afterward recited this blessing, this is a prayer made in vain, because blessing is found neither in a matter that is weighed, nor in a matter that is measured, nor in a matter that is counted."

The Chachamim describe a person entering his grain house to count





PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

what he has accumulated. The first step he takes is a prayer to experience Hashem's bracha. Interestingly, the prayer for Hashem's blessing can be recited only before items are fully accounted for. Once everything is counted, the prayer may not be said. This is expressing the spiritual reality that bracha is found on things that are 'hidden from one's eyes,' even the owner himself.

What can be learned from this fascinating principle? This teaching does not encourage irresponsibility with our finances under the guise of wanting to leave space in our lives for Hashem's bracha. We have a responsibility to make an effort, to do our hishtadlus, for our parnassah, which includes being aware of the financial resources we have so that we can decide how to spend it. However, a practical application of this teaching is how we should relate to the financial unknowns in our lives. In our world of hishtadlus and

responsible planning, it's easy to fall into a trap of experiencing stress over the inevitable uncounted factor or risk of the unknown.

There's a spiritual reality that bracha is found on things that are 'hidden from one's eyes,' even the owner himself.

The lesson from this week's parasha is that it's specifically within the unknown, what's hidden from our vision, where Hashem's blessing is to be found. With this mindset, we can shift how we experience the unexpected from worry to excitement and anticipation of Hashem's bracha.

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Taking Interest

Making a Loan Into an Investment

Rabbi Shloimy Muller

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

Last week we summarized the main points of a heter iska:

1. The money given by the bank is an investment, *not* a loan.
2. The lender is therefore entitled to the returns.
3. The lender agrees to accept a set amount in lieu of varying returns; these are the "interest" payments.
4. If the investment is not profitable, the borrower may swear to absolve himself from paying the settlement amount.

Let's elaborate the first point.

We must internalize that the money is an investment, and it is still owned by the lender/investor. This has pros and cons for the investor. On one hand, if the investment does well the investor has profited, and conversely, if the investment fails the investor loses his capital. However, the lender's money is relatively safe. The *heter iska* places the burden of proof on the borrower and requires him to prove with witnesses that the principle has been lost; otherwise, he must return what he has received, in addition to the profits if they have been earned.

Since the money is an investment, ideally the borrower should actually be investing the money. If one is borrowing

to purchase a home, that's a great investment for the *lender/bank*; owning real estate in Eretz Yisroel is profitable due to the consistent rise in prices. In addition, the home produces income in the form of rent collected from the tenants.

Even if the borrower will be living in the home and not renting it out, since the heter iska stipulates that the home belongs (at least partially) to the bank, the bank is eligible to receive rent. Consequently, the "interest" paid is a mix of the rent and profit reflecting the rising prices. The home will not belong to the bank permanently, because in addition to returning the profits, the monthly payout also serves to repay the principle, and in the case of a home, allows the homeowner to buy the home back.

If the borrower is not using the money for an investment, perhaps to make a *simcha* or to pay off debt, we have a problem. How can the borrower return more than he borrowed? In this case, how can we see the money given as an investment when the borrower just spends it and there are no possible profits? In the coming weeks we will discover if and how this works.

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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 Teachers' Seminary in Krakow. This week we will learn more about Frau Schenirer's teachings and her untimely death

Frau Schenirer was looked upon with reverence by even those outside the Seminary walls, as evidenced by a fascinating story related by Pearl Benisch:

"Once during class, a fashionably dressed young man, a total stranger, ran into the classroom in severe distress. He came up to our dear teacher and, tears rolling down his cheeks, begged, "Frau Schenirer, please come and help me. My child is very sick. The doctors have already given up on him. Only G-d Almighty can help him recover. Please come with me . . . and pray at the grave of the saintly Rema, which you do so often, and ask the great sage to plead with Heaven to heal my child."

Frau Schenirer did not think twice.

"May HaShem give me strength," she prayed, "to help the poor man." She excused herself from the girls. "Sorry, I know you'll understand," she said. ". . . Review your lessons and continue on your own with whatever you can. I will see you soon, G-d willing, but in the meantime, pray with me for the

recovery of this child."

Indeed, in recognition of her piety, saintliness, and accomplishments some Chassidic Rebbes would stand up for Frau Schenirer when she entered the room, and after Rav Meir Shapiro, legendary Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, visited the Seminary and met Frau Schenirer, he immediately sent girls from his city to join in her mission.

One of the countless, profound mission statements that Frau Schenirer conveyed to her students was a play on the timeless teaching by Rav Simchah Bunim of Peshischa that a person should carry two "notes" in his two pockets, one which says "The world was created for me", (*Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 4:5), and another that says: "I am but earth and ash", (*Bereishis* 18:27). Meaning, we must all feel powerful and important, but also humble and meek, keenly aware of our frailty and vulnerability. Frau Schenirer would say that every woman must carry two notes in her two pockets, one bearing the message,



BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY



”כָּל כְּבוֹדָהּ בֵּת מִלֶּךְ פְּנִימָה” (“All the honor of a princess is inward”, (*Tehilim* 45:14), and one announcing, “When the time comes to act for G-d,” the Pasuk cited earlier establishing the need to occasionally suspend a Torah principle when necessary to save our tradition.

There are times, Frau Schenirer taught, when a Jewish woman must carry herself with modesty and reserve, but there are other times when she must rise to the occasion and act—even publicly—for the sake of HaShem and Klal Yisrael.

In 1931, at the age of forty-eight, Sarah Schenirer married Rav Yitzchak Landau, a grandson of Rav Shlomo of Radomsk (the *Tiferes Shlomo*). Unfortunately, however, just three years later, she fell ill with stomach cancer. Even from her hospital bed, she wrote letters of guidance and inspiration to her students and fielded questions from women in leadership positions around the world.

She underwent surgery in a hospital in Vienna, but upon her return home to Poland, her condition deteriorated. On Erev Shabbos, Adar I 26, 1935, she asked that her candlesticks be brought so she could light the Shabbos candles early. After lighting the candles, she fell asleep . . . and never woke

again. At the age of just fifty-two, Sarah, the righteous matriarch to thousands upon thousands of Jewish women, passed away.

The Old Matzeivah and the New

In July, 2017, during one of his Jewish Heritage Tours to Poland, Dr. Shnayer Leiman related the story behind the Matzeivah that currently stands at Sarah Schenirer’s resting place in the Jewish Cemetery of Krakow.

He told that every year, until World War II, thousands of girls would gather around Sarah Schenirer’s gravesite in the Krakow cemetery to recite Tehilim. Not one person, however, ever took a photograph of the grave, and so we have no documented information about the Matzeivah.

Dr. Leiman said that he spoke to every living graduate of the Teachers’ Seminary in Krakow, but nobody had any recollection of the Matzeivah. Finally, he learned that there was a Jew in Brooklyn who had seen the Matzeivah and survived the war. Dr. Leiman heard about this fellow on Shabbos, and that Motzaei Shabbos he drove to his home.

He asked the man what he could tell him about Sarah Schenirer’s Matzeivah.



BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY



"I'm the one who chopped it down," he said.

He explained that during the Nazi occupation, he was taken to the Plaszow concentration camp in Krakow, and the Nazis wanted to expand the camp into the territory of cemetery.

They therefore brought a group of prisoners to the cemetery, handed them axes, and told them to

chop down every Matzeivah in the cemetery. He was physically unable to knock them down, and

the Nazi soldiers slapped and kicked him.

When he came to Sarah Schenirer's Matzeivah, he recalled, he saw the words: "The modest and righteous one." He said he'll never forget taking the axe and trying unsuccessfully to destroy it. Finally, it was destroyed by the Nazis.

The inscription now bears the words "The modest and righteous one" as well as a number of pesukim which Sarah Schenirer mentioned in her last will and testament as pesukim which should accompany a person at all

times.

Along such pesukim as "I have placed G-d opposite me, always" (*Tehilim* 16:8), "The beginning of wisdom is fear of G-d" (*Tehilim* 111:10) and others, she mentioned also another pasuk which we wouldn't have expected to be included in this group: "Inform us to count our days" (*Tehillim* 90:12).

Dr. Leiman surmised that Sarah Schenirer, who was fluent in the writings of Rav Hirsch, likely had in mind Rav Hirsch's powerful interpretation of this Pasuk in his commentary to Tehilim. He understands this pasuk as a prayer not that HaKadosh Baruch Hu should inform us how to count our days, but rather how to make our days count, how to live a life of meaning, of purpose, and of true achievement.

Accordingly, this is a most fitting pasuk to carry with us at all times, and a most fitting addition to the text on the tombstone memorializing this extraordinary woman.



A Mother Is As Happy As...

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships Coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*

My bet is that most of us know the end of this old adage, right? A mother is as happy as her unhappiest child. I grew up on this one. And it's no

who each has five happy children, who each has five happy children, until Leah feels better, Sarah won't either.

Why does my unhappiest child need to carry the burden of my unhappiness?

It seems a bit disproportionate, mathematically speaking, doesn't it?

And there's another issue. Forgot poor Sara for a minute. Let's focus on poor Leah. You see, poor Leah is having a hard time. That's why she's unhappy. But whatever load she is carrying, it has now been tripled. Instead of getting to deal with her own pain, she is now responsible for the pain of so many other people! She now not only has pain, but she has guilt to boot!

wonder. How can a mother be happy when her child is suffering?

Only there's a mathematical issue with the equation here. Bear with me as I try to explain.

In this story, Sara is the mother of Rivka, the grandmother of Rachel, and the great-grandmother of Leah. Even though Sara may have many other happy offspring, according to the adage, if Leah is unhappy, then so must her mother Rachel be. And if Rachel is unhappy, then so must her mother Rivka be. And if Rivka is unhappy, then so must Sara be. Even though Sara has five happy children

As a wise friend once taught me when we were discussing mothers and their unhappiest children: Why does my unhappiest child need to carry the burden of my unhappiness?

And you know why? Because Jewish parents feel guilty. If we have an unhappy child and are not feeling as unhappy as that child, we feel guilty.. How can I possibly feel happiness when my child is feeling pain? Doesn't that make me a bad parent? Don't good Jewish moms and dads prove





commitment and love by showering our children with dollops of misery and worry?

So how about this for a novel answer: Maybe we should ask ourselves what our child in pain needs rather than wallow in the pain that makes us feel worse about life. That is, worse about life but better about ourselves.

I don't mean to be harsh. (Okay, I do, a bit). If we're feeling bad to make us feel that we're good parents, but, in so doing, are making it harder on our unhappy child, then we're being selfish.

Obviously, that's not to say that we should or even could be happy in the face of our child's pain. But when we see a child in pain, we can ask ourselves some important questions.

1. What does this child need from me?
2. Can I be there for my child without, as it were, becoming them? Can I understand my child's pain rather than catching it like a virus?
3. Can I respect the fact that my child is a separate entity from me, and can I allow her to have an experience that's outside of my own?
4. Can I trust my child's ability to cope with challenges and trust in

her ability to come through this?

5. Do I trust that Hashem is my child's parent more deeply than I am?
6. What do the other people in my life require from me at this moment, and am I being responsible to them, too?

Maybe we'll find that there's a difference between feeling the pain of our unhappiest child and being

Maybe we should ask ourselves what our child in pain needs rather than wallow in the pain that makes us feel worse about life...but better about ourselves.

as unhappy as our unhappiest child. Maybe we'll learn that we can feel pain while holding space for joy and that the two are not contradictory. And with Hashem's help, if we do that well, maybe we'll be the role models we need to be so our unhappiest children can follow the path to greater happiness.



Can a Jew Visit Egypt?

Josh and Tammy Kruger

The Story

It was a beautiful day in Toronto. Hillel and his sister Avital were returning home with their father from a fun trip to the neighborhood park. They passed a newspaper stand and glanced at the front-page headlines.

"What is Egypt?" asked 6-year-old Avital.

"I'm impressed that you were able to read that word," replied her father. "Well done!"

Hillel answered. "Egypt is another name for *Mitzrayim*, the land where the Jewish people became the slaves to Pharaoh."

"Oh," said Avital excitedly. "That's where they built giant pyramids! Abba, could we take a trip to see the pyramids?"

Hillel jumped in. "Avital, the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years until Hashem came to rescue them. If we learned our lesson from the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* we should know that we should never go back to Egypt. Isn't that right, Abba?"

Discussion

Q: What connection does this story have with our *parasha*?

A: The sixth aliyah of our *parasha*

is the famous *tochacha*, where the Torah describes all the terrible things that will happen to the Jewish people if they do not follow its rules. One of the punishments listed here is that the Jews will be brought back to Egypt and will be sold as slaves (Ki Savo 68).

Q: In *Parashas Shoftim*, the Torah also mentioned Egypt when it teaches the rules for a Jewish king. What exactly does it say?

A: At the time of the Jewish kings, Egypt had a lot of horses. Hashem was worried that if the Jewish king wanted too many horses, then he would need to send Jews to Egypt to buy them. This would be a problem because the Torah says "You shall not return that way any more" (*Devarim* 17:16).

Q: Is it *halachically* alright for a Jew to visit Egypt?

A: Interestingly, there is no problem traveling to Egypt if it is just for a visit (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin*, end of the tenth *perek*; *Radvaz, Commentary on Rambam, Laws of Kings*, 5, 7 & 8).

Q: Is it *halachically* alright for a Jew to live in Egypt?

A: There are a variety of opinions on this issue. Some *poskim* say that there is no problem in our time because





PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



the restriction was lifted after the Egyptian people were exiled by Sennacherib, the King of Assyria thousands of years ago (*Semag* Negative Command 227 and *Ritvah* on *Yomah* 38a). The population living in Egypt thereafter was not the same population that was involved in the enslavement of the Jews. They also state that the restriction only applied up to the time of the second galut (*Ritvah* on *Yomah* 38a).

However, other poskim indicate that the restriction applies even today. But some say that it depends specifically on how the Jew is traveling to Egypt: The Torah says, "You shall not return that way any more" rather than "You shall not return there any more." One opinion is that it is forbidden for a Jew to travel from Israel to Egypt, the path that the Jews traveled in the Torah (Rabbi Eliezer of Metz, *Yere'm* s. 309). Another opinion states that it is only forbidden to travel from Israel to Egypt along a path that passes through the 42 encampments of the Jews in

the desert (Divrei Shaul by Rabbi Yosef Shaul Halevi Nathansohn, *Mahadurah Kamah*, *Parashat Masei*).

Q: Can you think of some famous rabbis who lived in Egypt?

A: The Rambam, the Arizal, and the Radvaz (from the previous answer)!

Back to Our Story

Avital discussed the issue with Hillel and her father.

"Well, Avital, maybe I was wrong," said Hillel. "It seems that there wouldn't be a halachic problem to go to Egypt if we were only going for a visit."

"Maybe," said Avital. "But the truth is that I'd rather visit Israel. There are also many amazing things to see, and I'm sure that the kosher food is way better than anything we'll find in Egypt."

The three of them laughed.

Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer and Rabbi Aryeh Citron. Based on the article "The Prohibition of Living in Egypt" by Rabbi Citron at www.chabad.org.



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