

# Kehillah #42



## THE PERTINENT PARASHA

### Rising to Take Responsibility

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

The Torah bestows the rare title of tzaddik upon Noach: “Noach was a righteous person, he was complete in his generations.” Yet, immediately after the flood, we find Noach acting in a way entirely out of character for a tzaddik. Starting anew after the destruction of civilization, Noach begins the annals of the new world by planting a vine, producing wine, and getting drunk.

According to one opinion in Chazal, Noach was only a tzaddik relative to his own generation; relative to Avraham Avinu, he would not have merited the title. Nonetheless, the behavior of drinking to drunkenness, which had disastrous consequences for his family, seems unbecoming even to a relative tzaddik. What stands behind Noach’s bizarre actions?

It seems that Noach joined the tradition of *Sefer Bereshis*, up to Avraham Avinu, of refusing to take responsibility. Adam and Chava sinned, and refused to accept responsibility in

hiding from Hashem. Cain killed his brother, and, like Adam, was unwilling to accept responsibility: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The same is true of Noach. He was righteous in his actions yet was found lacking. He could not step up to the colossal challenge of reestablishing

**Our greatness is our responsibility - a responsibility for bringing the light of Hashem into the world.**

the world. Instead, he escaped it by drinking to stupor.

Indeed, Chazal draw a parallel between Noach and Avraham and between Noach and Moshe Rabbenu. Both Avraham and Moshe beseeched Hashem to renege from an evil decree - Avraham for Sodom and Moshe for the Jewish people. In contrast, Noach failed to daven for his gener-





## THE PERTINENT PARASHA



ation. He was unable or unwilling to step up to the plate.

Getting drunk is the epitome of avoiding responsibility. Charged with stamping his mark on the post-flood reality, Noach bowed out of the arena. To be sure, he was righteous, but the task was too much for him. Instead, the role of bringing the way of Hashem to humankind was assigned to Avraham Avinu, who (as Chazal teach) "took the reward of all of them" – of all earlier generations.

Avraham's greatness – Chazal call him "the greatest of giants" (*Bereishis Rabba* 14:6) – was defined by responsibility. The connection between the two was noted by Winston Churchill in his 1943 Harvard University address to the American people. The speech can be summed up in six words: "The price of greatness is responsibility." Being great implies being responsible.

The Jewish people are a great nation, "one nation upon the earth." Our greatness is our responsibility – a responsibility for bringing the light of Hashem into the world. While we are always charged with responsibility, the demand is most prominent during times of hardship and strife. Now, as we go through times of war, the deep call of responsibility must be heard by all of us.

**Wars are won and lost on national morale. Simply staying here despite other options strengthens the national morale.**

As the war effort deepens – may Hashem send us a speedy victory – many asked me whether they should stay in Israel, or whether it could be more prudent to return to *chutz la'aretz*, sometimes on parental demand. Of course, there is no single answer to such questions, which greatly depend on personal circumstances. Generally, however, our basic responsibility to the Jewish people is a central factor.

There is much that all of us can do towards the war effort – volunteering in a range of activities, advocating on Israel's behalf, attending funerals and shiva homes (we should know no more grief), and so on. Beyond this, wars are won and lost on national morale. Simply staying here despite other options – many of us have the privilege of choosing to embrace our responsibility – strengthens the national morale.

Wars are times of national greatness. We are all part of the greatness. Its price is responsibility. May we all rise to the challenge, wherever it lies.



### “And Dovid Strengthened Himself in *Hashem Elokav*”

Rabbi Dovid Miller | Rosh Kollel RIETS Israel Kollel, Gruss Institute, Jerusalem

The court tells the witnesses – Therefore, Adam was created alone, to teach you that anyone who destroys one soul from the Jewish people, it is as if he destroyed an entire world (*Sanhedrin 37a*).

In the pogrom on Shabbat Shemini Atzeret, 1,300 worlds, the murdered, have been destroyed; 3,600 worlds, the wounded, have been shattered; the fate of an additional 150 worlds, the captives, is uncertain at best. And why? Because they are Jews living in our homeland, our Jewish state. All the murdered are *kedoshim*, are martyrs, according to halacha.

The mood in the country is one of heartbreak, of deep pain, over the dead, the injured, the captives, and their families. For many, there is a protracted period of *meito mutal lefanav*, until the burials and the shiva. May Hashem quickly bring back our captives, heal the wounded, and bring consolation to the mourning families.

We have a tradition – *Ieka midi dlo remiza borayta* – there is no situation that is not hinted at in our Torah. We find towards the end of *Shmuel Alef* (Chapter 30), that Dovid and his soldiers return to their base in the town of Tziklag, in the south of Israel, near

the land of the Plishtim. They find the town burnt to the ground by the Amaleikim, and all the women and children were taken captive.

The Navi describes their reaction: They cried until they were not able to cry any longer. Dovid felt terrible pain. There was a heartfelt hurt that was felt by each and every soldier whose family was taken captive. Then the Navi states: *Vayitchazek Dovid BaShem Elokav* (*Shmuel Alef, 30; 6*).

Dovid strengthened himself by realizing that there certainly was a painful *midat hadin*, represented by the name *Elokav*, but it was stemming from the name Hashem, the *midda* of *rachamim*, the love, the *ahava* of HaKadosh Baruch Hu towards us that is eternal.

With this perspective of *emuna* and *bitachon* – that Hashemis in charge, that He loves us and protects us, that He gives us our lives and the resilience, the *koach*, to fight – Dovid rose and fought and recovered all that had been taken. This was the turning point in Dovid’s life. He moved on to rule over his tribe, Yehuda, and then became Melech Yisrael, and then he prepared the nation for the building of the *Beit HaMikdash* – *Mizmor Shir Chanukat HaBayit l’Dovid*.



## HASHKAFICALLY SPEAKING

<<

This *Vayitchazek BaShem Elokav* is our challenge. Those of us who are privileged to sit in the tents of Torah to intensify our learning, creating the *omdot hayu raglainu* – the victory over our enemies – due to *B'Shaarayich Yerushalayim* – the learning of Torah (*Makkot 10a*).

All of us should intensify our *tefillot*. In *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* (Chapter 32), we find that Hashem told Avraham to name his son Yishmael as He knew that in the end of days this son would cause

tremendous suffering to the sons of Yitzchak, to the degree that they will cry out to HaShem, and Hashem will listen to our prayers! *Yishma Kel!*

All of us should continue to maintain the *achdut*, the tremendous unity, that has revealed itself among us, and strengthens us and our soldiers. The current phenomenon of everyone putting their personal needs on hold and doing whatever they can for *Klal Yisrael* is awesome! *Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek.*



## MEKOM AVODA

### Workplace Ethics & Halacha

#### Honoring Agreements

Rabbi Asher Meir | Torah and Policy Researcher

Our *parasha* tells first of the flood that wiped out an entire generation of corrupt human beings, and then of the generation of the Tower of Bavel who were dispersed throughout the earth. These two groups were singled out in a unique imprecation applied in monetary matters. The Mishna (*Bava Metzia 4:2*) states:

If [the buyer] paid the money but did not [yet] take possession of the produce, he is entitled to renege. But it is said, He Who collected from the generation of the flood (*dor hamabul*) and the

generation of the dispersion (*dor hapalaga*), will [likewise] collect from someone who does not fulfill his promise.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia 48b*) rules that this accountability is not merely something mentioned in the Mishna; the disappointed party can prevail on the *beis din* to apply it to the reneging party. The imprecation is referred to as *mi shepara*, meaning "He Who collected."

To understand this rule, let us provide some context. Halacha recognizes various levels of agreement:





**Act of acquisition (*kinyan*):** This is not an agreement to sell but an actual transfer of ownership. In the case of the Mishna, if the buyer

were to actually take possession of the produce, he would become the owner. Reneging is out of the question.

considered “unfaithful” – *mechusar amana* – and Chazal state that “the Sages are disappointed with him” (*Bava Metzia* 48a; *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 204:7). According to many *poskim*, reneging here is permissible if there is a material change in circumstances, such as an unexpected price swing (*Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 204:11 and Rema).

**Monetary infractions are also a violation of Hashem’s standards.**

**Offer and acceptance accompanied by an act of commitment (*matan damim*):** This is the case of *mi shepara*. The sides agree on a price, and furthermore, the customer advances the money. No *kinyan* has taken place (since the Sages declared that a transfer of money is insufficient to complete the transaction), so both sides may renege, but the disappointed party can ask *beis din* to solemnly declare accountability for reneging (*Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 204).

**Verbal offer and acceptance (*pesikas damim*):** The sides agree on a price and other core terms, but without any act of commitment, such as handing over money or signing an agreement. In this case, reneging is

**Unilateral promise:** A person is allowed to change his mind regarding such a promise if there is some new consideration that arises or that occurs to him, but such a promise must be given in good faith (*Bava Metzia* 49a.). In a few instances (such as a promise to give a small gift), the recipient of the promise typically relies on it. In that case it is considered like offer and acceptance.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 49a) makes clear that sanctions for reneging apply only where the sides are justified in relying on the agreement. This makes sense, because the costs of reliance can be substantial. Perhaps the purchaser is a manufacturer who purchases other inputs, knowing that he has lined up a supplier for one kind of material. Or the seller agrees to an important acquisition, relying on the incoming money.



## MEKOM AVODA

### Workplace Ethics & Halacha



Another possible rationale is to encourage good-faith bargaining. Disclosing your “reserve price” – the price you’re willing to close a deal at – greatly weakens your bargaining position. Often, the final price is thus only disclosed when there is some guarantee that it’s final. If no offer is binding, then both sides will be reluctant to make offers, accept them, or believe them. Negotiations could easily become futile. Creating a norm of finality for offer and acceptance facilitates constructive negotiations.

Consider now the wording of the imprecation in the Mishna. How exactly is renegeing on a purchase comparable to the generations of the flood and the dispersion? *Dor hamabul* and *dor hapalaga* habitually flouted the most severe prohibitions of mankind, including adultery, theft, and rebellion against Hashem. Yet if someone gives me a few shekels for a sandwich and I change my mind and decide to eat it myself, I haven’t (strictly speaking) transgressed any prohibition at all.

The *Shoshanim LeDavid* on the Mishna points out that in these two cases the Torah explicitly states that Hashem punished the wrongdoers Himself, not through an intermediary.

Rav Asher Weiss points out that the generation of the flood mainly sinned against human beings, and that of the dispersion mainly sinned against Hashem. The imprecation reminds us that monetary infractions are also a violation of Hashem’s standards.

I would add this similarity: In both cases, Hashem stated in advance that He would collect from the wrongdoers: “I will wipe out mankind, which I created” (*Bereishis* 6:6), and “Let us [the majestic plural, or “royal we”] descend and confuse their language” (*Bereishis* 11:7). In both cases, it must have been difficult for Hashem to carry out His sentence. Man was the pinnacle of His creation, while the unity achieved by the *dor hapalaga* was admirable, though used for harmful ends. So we can understand the imprecation as follows: Hashem keeps His word even when it is hard for Him, so it is fair for Him to even the score when you renege on your word for a comparatively small benefit.

According to this understanding, the reference to *dor hamabul* and *dor hapalaga* is not meant to emphasize Hashem’s attribute of vengeance, but rather His reluctance to punish His creatures, even when justice requires it.



## TAKING INTEREST

### Interest Rates and *Heter Iska*

Rabbi Shloimy Muller

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

Let's finish discussing the mechanics of the *heter iska* and its practical ramifications and limitations. Previously we explained the first few points of the *heter iska* – the *heter iska* turns the loan into an investment the lender makes and the interest paid is really the profits produced by the investment or a settlement agreed upon (i.e., the interest rate).

It follows that the interest rate must be a reasonable assessment of profit that one can possibly make. To take a loan from another Jew with a very high interest rate via *heter iska* is problematic, because the lender is basically forcing the borrower to return more than he can earn, which in effect is *ribbis*. However, the standard interest rates that the bank charges most people are okay, because this is usually the profit one can earn with the money, either through rising property prices and rent, or by lending the money to non-Jews with interest.

The above limitation applies to the standard loan to buy an apartment or house, or if one already has preexisting profitable endeavors. However, if one has an opportunity to make a large profit on a deal, he may use the *heter iska* to borrow at

higher-than-typical interest rates reflecting the potential profits.

The last of the four main points is: If the investment is not profitable, the borrower may swear to absolve himself of paying the settlement amount. (In certain cases, there is even room to avoid payments on the principle.)

Since the interest is in reality the profits earned, there is no reason to pay if there are no profits. In fact, to pay in absence of profits is essentially *ribbis*, because one is benefiting his lender. To resolve this problem, the *heter iska* gives the borrower the right to swear and verify that he or she did not profit from the borrowed money, absolving them of the obligation to pay.

It's not enough that this clause exists; it's necessary for the borrower to be aware of it to truly avoid *ribbis*. This condition sets the stage for the monthly payments to be an expression of profits earned, not something we're forced to pay.

Based on the above, one may wonder, Why do we pay interest monthly on money borrowed? Aren't there many months when we lost money? We'll discuss this next week.

## Spiritual Transformation through Work

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

In our current situation, each of us is trying to do what he or she can to create merits to protect our families and all the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. While witnessing the endless initiatives of Torah study, *tefilla*, and *chesed* created among Jews the world over, well-intentioned Jews who want to help have voiced frustration over being tied up with their own responsibilities in *parnassa*. Without proper guidance, this inner tension can lead to feeling guilty or overwhelmed. This week's *parasha* gives us insight into what we can do to create merits even from our work desk.

The commentators ask why the flood is seemingly attributed to the hero of the *parasha*, Noach, since the prophet (Yeshaya 54) refers to the flood as "*mei Noach*," "the flood of Noach." The Alter Rebbe (*Torah Ohr, Mayim Rabbim*) suggests a novel approach, explaining that "*mei Noach*" can be understood as related to the word *menucha*, "rest."

The floodwaters were not merely a pathway of destruction but a means to purify the world of its impurities. Like one who immerses in a mikveh containing forty *se'ah*, the world

**Just as the waters of the flood purified the world, so too does our engagement in *parnassa* achieve a higher purpose.**

was immersed in a mikveh of water created in forty days. In this sense, the floodwaters brought a feeling of rest and *nachas* to Hashem.

### Drowning in To-Do Lists

The Alter Rebbe explains that our need to be preoccupied with the physical world and earning a livelihood is another expression of raging floodwaters. We sometimes feel we're drowning in our to-do lists, jobs, finances, and overwhelming responsibilities of *parnassa*. Yet just as the waters of the flood purified the world, so too does our engagement in *parnassa* achieve a higher purpose. It is part of our *avodas Hashem*, a pathway to reaching higher levels in *ruchniyus*.

This great spiritual opportunity does not mitigate the challenges involved. It's certainly easier to feel connected to *avodas Hashem* when reciting Tehillim or sitting with a Gemara than when dealing with work or finances. Yet the Alter Rebbe's





## PARASHA AND PARNASSAH



<<

teaching empowers us to look at our seemingly mundane pursuit of *parnassa* differently. We can step up to the challenge, work at our jobs with a higher intention, and become transformed through them.

During this time, when you may feel at a loss as to what you can do for the nation, make the decision to reframe your 9-to-5 job. Make the choice to approach each day of work as a way to grow in *avodas Hashem* and dedicate the merits you accrue through this growth to the safety and success of the Jewish people, and the bringing of Mashiach, soon in our days.



## BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

### Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog: Early Rabbinic Career

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

*Last week, we opened the biographical sketch of Rabbi Herzog, Israel's first chief rabbi. After outlining his early years, we move on this week to the start of his rabbinic career.*

In 1914, at the age of twenty-five, Rav Herzog was awarded a doctorate in literature from the University of London. His dissertation was published in English in 1981 under the title "The Dyeing of Purple in Ancient Israel." Several years later, in 1987, Keter Publishing House in Israel produced an annotated edition of the work entitled *The Royal Purple and the Biblical Blue: Argaman and Tekhelet: The Study of Chief Rabbi Dr. Isaac Herzog on the Dye Industries in Ancient Israel and Recent Scientific*

*Contributions.*

In 1915, Rav Herzog accepted his first rabbinic position as the rav of Belfast, Ireland. Two years later, in 1917, Britain's foreign secretary Lord Arthur Balfour issued the famous "Balfour Declaration" affirming the British government's support for establishing a "National Home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, as Eretz Yisrael was then called. This declaration elicited a great deal of enthusiasm among Zionists and their supporters who sought to



## BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

establish a sovereign Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Herzog exerted great efforts to advance the cause, founding a chapter of the religious-Zionist Mizrahi movement in Ireland, and meeting with politicians to lobby for the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

That same year, Rav Herzog met his bride. He had been invited to attend a meeting in London together with some of the city's most prestigious rabbinic figures – England's chief rabbi, Rav Joseph Hertz; Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook, who was then the rav in Yaffo but spent World War I in Europe and served as rav of the *Machazikei HaDas* community in London; and a prominent member of the London Beth Din, Rav Shmuel Yitzchak Hillman.

The *rabbanim* convened to discuss the possibility of permitting the consumption of *kitniyos* during Pesach that year, due to the dire food shortage wrought by World War I, which made it very difficult for Jews to obtain food products for Pesach. After the meeting, Rav Hillman invited the group to his home for refreshments, and Rav Hillman's daughter, Sarah, served them tea. She caught Rav Herzog's attention, and he later visited the Hillman

home for a second time. Sarah was struck by both his brilliant mind and refined character. The match was made, and they got married several months later, in the summer.

The couple returned to Belfast, and

***Rabbanim* convened to discuss permitting consumption of *kitniyos* during Pesach that year, due to dire food shortages in World War I.**

a year later, in 1918, their first son was born. They named him Chaim after Rav Hillman's esteemed rebbi, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk. (Customarily, the mother's family chooses the name of the first child.) Chaim Herzog would eventually become an Israeli diplomat and politician, and then the sixth president of the State of Israel. That same year, Rav Herzog was promoted to the position of rav of Dublin, and effectively became chief rabbi of Ireland, a role he would serve for the next eighteen years. This was an especially volatile period, as Ireland declared its independence from Great Britain in 1919.

As Ireland's chief rabbi, Rav Herzog could not publicly support either





party to this conflict, but he secretly provided assistance and support to the Irish rebels. On one occasion, a rebel leader was being hunted down by the British forces, and he hid in Rav Herzog's home. When the British troops came to the neighborhood, they were told that only Jews lived there, and they left.

In 1922, Rav Yitzchak Isaac and Sarah had their second son, whom they named Yaakov David, after the Ridvaz, who, as mentioned, granted Rav Herzog semicha, and who had passed away in Tzefas in 1913. Yaakov David grew to become a renowned *talmid chacham*, legal scholar, and diplomat, who always assisted and stood alongside his father.

**These two outstanding luminaries, who represented conflicting approaches to Talmud study, came together in the Herzog home, through the names of Rav Herzog's sons**

Interestingly, Rav Herzog's two sons were named after Rav Chaim of Brisk, founder of the Brisker *derech*, a style of Talmudic analysis characterized by abstract conceptualization, and the Ridvaz, one of the leading critics of the Brisker style of learning.

These two outstanding luminaries, who represented conflicting approaches to Talmud study, in a sense came together in the Herzog home, through the names of Rav Herzog's sons.

### Succeeding a Giant

In 1935, Rav Yoel Herzog passed away in Paris. After an interim burial in France, his remains were brought to Eretz Yisrael and reinterred on Har Hazeisim. Rav Herzog spent six weeks in Eretz Yisrael, where he delivered eulogies for his father and shiurim throughout the land. When he returned home to Ireland, a letter had arrived from his father's community in Paris inviting him to succeed him as their rav.

At the same time, notices appeared in newspapers in Eretz Yisrael announcing that Rav Herzog was being considered as a candidate for chief rabbi of Tel Aviv. The other two candidates were Rav Moshe Avigdor Amiel of Antwerp and Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Boston. In the end, the voting committee elected Rav Amiel.

Soon thereafter, however, Rav Herzog again received an invitation to assume a distinguished religious leadership role in Eretz Yisrael.



### A Fight for Good

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*.

I write this on Day 9. Who knows what will be relevant and irrelevant by the time you read this. I hope I get a call saying we're scrapping the article; it's no longer relevant. But I'm not sure this is going to be over so fast.

For me, like many of you, I have had a frustrating week of feeling entirely useless. But that being said, my path crossed with many people, somehow. I held little baby Eli in my arms. Eli is six months old. She is blissfully ignorant and smiling away. What she doesn't know is that the breast milk she is drinking has been donated by nursing mothers as part of one of the amazing initiatives of *chesed* in the country. Her mother can't feed her because she was abducted to Gaza.

And I met Gaya. She's only twenty-one. But she's moved in with her boyfriend's family after her father, grandmother, two siblings, and cousin went missing. Not only is she alone, but they also burnt down her house. She has nowhere else to go.

I met people sitting shiva, *Rachmana litzlan*. I met a group of war wives, supporting each other as they carry

the brunt of their responsibilities at home, bravely hiding their fears and anxieties from the little ones that they are parenting alone.

How does this country divide at the moment? Those who are mourning their loved ones. Those who aren't sure whether to wish to mourn for their missing loved ones or hold onto the hope that they will yet be reunited. Those who can't sleep at night praying that their brave loved ones will be safe and there will be no mourning.

This is where we are. In one terrible, endless week, this is where we are.

But when we peek out of the intensity of the pain and loss that racks this country, there is something much bigger going on. This is not just a Hamas-Israel war. The narrative has spread well beyond our borders.

On the international level, there is a war between our supporters and the pro-Palestinian supporters. It's happening all over the world. It's in politics, on campus, and wildly online. The question of anti-semitism has evolved to a question of good versus evil.





We are all asking the same thing aren't we? Where was Israel? Where was the defense? What happened to our intelligence? It's not the right question. This country's history is full of war absurdity. How else would we have won the Six-Day War? We take comfort in blaming human error for what happened at the beginning of this horrible war because it deflects the frightening truth. Hashem opened the gates to the enemy.

And now we have to win back His *shemira*. We can no longer afford to rest on our laurels. We aren't just at war with Hamas. We, the people who stand for values and morality, need to prevail. We will in the end prevail, of course, but right now we have to tap into what it really means to be the *Am Hanivchar*.

It's neither enough to be unified in *chesed* nor to be unified in grief. We have to access our identity to such a degree that when this war is over, we remain clear about and committed to what we stand for.

While we cry our bitter tears and bury our countless dead, as a nation and as individuals we must find the strength to tap into our mission as the people of Israel and assume the task bequeathed to us since the days of Avraham, to show the world how to live.

The Torah is not the Jewish G-d's book of laws for the Jews. It's the G-d of humanity's book of morality to the world, through the Jews. This is our legacy. This is how we unify. This is what we have to do. We have to regain the *shemira* which we took for granted and no longer deserved. It's a fight for life. A fight for good.

**We cannot just mourn. We also have to stand up for the mission at hand. To lead the world in this war against evil.**

And it's the imperative of that fight that will give us strength, even though we feel devastated. We don't have the luxury to sit. We cannot just mourn. We also have to stand up for something, stand up for the mission at hand. To lead the world in this war against evil, to teach the world what we are here to teach them.

May we all find the strength.

May we continue to be united.

May we all stay safe.

May we achieve our immediate goals as a country and our historical mission as a nation.

May the forces of light prevail over the forces of darkness.

*Am Yisrael Chai.*



## Prayer in a Foreign Language

Josh and Tammy Kruger

### The Story:

One Shabbos morning in Jerusalem, Nadav left his home to pray shacharis at his local shul. When he reached the street corner he saw a familiar face. It was the boy who had recently joined his school. They were not in the same class, but Nadav had noticed him in the schoolyard. Nadav excitedly approached the boy and began to introduce himself.

The boy blushed and said "Excuse me, but do you speak English?"

"Yes," Nadav replied. "My parents made aliyah from America, and we speak English at home."

"Oh, good" said the boy. "My name is Joseph. My family just made aliyah from Argentina. I speak Spanish and a little bit of English. I am learning Hebrew now."

"That must be very challenging" said Nadav. "How can you learn at school?"

"I was put in a special ulpan program to help me learn," replied Joseph.

Nadav had a question. "Tell me something, Joseph. When you pray in shul, do you pray in Spanish?"

"No" Joseph replied. "I was taught in Argentina how to read Hebrew, so I can say the Hebrew words in the siddur. But it is hard for me to understand the words."

Nadav was surprised. "That doesn't make sense to me! It's so important to have kavanah when you're praying. How can you have kavanah if you don't understand what you're saying? Hashem obviously has the ability to understand any language. Don't you think it would be better to pray in Spanish?"

"Maybe you're right" said Joseph. "Let's ask the Rav of the shul when we arrive."

### Discussion

**Q:** What is the connection between Parashas Noah and this story?

**A:** After the flood, the people of the world joined together to build a tower that would allow them to reach the Heavens and make





war with Hashem (Migdal Bavel). At that time only one language was spoken in the world - lashon hakodesh. Hashem stopped their plan by causing each person to start speaking in one of seventy languages. The group could not work together anymore because they could not understand each other. They stopped building the tower, and spread out to live in different places. This is why the world has so many languages.

**Q:** Is it proper for Joseph, who doesn't speak Hebrew, to pray by reading Hebrew words in the siddur that he doesn't understand? Can he fulfill the mitzvah of prayer?

**A:** Yes. It's surprising, but it is proper for Joseph to pray by reading the Hebrew words of the siddur even though he doesn't understand them. There are two reasons for this (*Mishnah Berurah* 62:3):

1) Hebrew is the lashon *hakodesh* and prayers in the lashon *hakodesh* are very powerful. Even if the person doesn't understand the words coming out of their mouth, the words still have a very important effect in ways that we can't understand.

2) The Hebrew words in the siddur were very carefully written by

*talmidei chachamim*. They knew many secrets that we do not understand and chose the words of the tefillos very specifically. So it's not just a matter of praying in Hebrew. If someone prays in Hebrew but uses his own words, then the power of his tefillos is not as strong. The tefillos that come out of our mouths should sound exactly the same way that the *talmidei chachamim* intended them to be.

**Q:** Does that mean that it's forbidden to pray in any other language?

**A:** No. There are many examples in the *sifrei kodesh* of *talmidei chachamim* who gave permission to pray in other languages when needed (*Brachos* 13a, *Rambam Keriyas Shema* 2:10, *Iggros Moshe, Orach Chaim* 4:70, sec. 4). However, praying in a different language must be done very carefully. Rav Moshe Feinstein, for example, explains that the person should not make up his own words. He should follow a translation that was made by bnei Torah, so that the power of the tefillos is preserved as much as possible.

**Q:** In our story, it would be a problem for Joseph to pray in





## PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



Spanish. Do you know why?

**A:** A person can only pray in a different language if he's in a place where that language is normally spoken (*Biur Halachah* 62:2). For example, Joseph can use Spanish in Argentina, Spain, or Mexico. Our story takes place in Jerusalem, and Spanish is not a local language. It would therefore be a problem for Joseph to pray in Spanish.

### Back to Our Story

After the Rav explained to the boys the halachos, Nadav turned to Joseph.

"I have an idea, Joseph. Let's start spending time together, and I will help you to learn the Hebrew words in the siddur."

"Thank you very much, Nadav. I may not know much Hebrew, but I did learn that Nadav means generous, and you are certainly a generous person."

"I am very proud of you both" said the Rav. "And since shacharis only starts in 15 minutes you can begin your lessons immediately."

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



**Kehillah**  
Community. Education. Leadership

Kehillah is an organization dedicated to serving the Anglo-Torah community living in Israel. It is active in areas of community, education, and leadership.

We welcome your feedback! Please send comments, insights, and suggestions to: [info@kehillah.org.il](mailto:info@kehillah.org.il)

