

Kehillah #47



THE PERTINENT PARASHA

A Ladder of Prayer

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

On multiple occasions, Hashem appears to the Avos to affirm and reiterate the blessings initially conferred upon Avraham. But only once, as Yaakov is about to leave the land, does this take place in the setting of a ladder whose bottom touches the earth and top reaches the heavens. What is the meaning of this unique setting?

The answer lies in the character of the *beracha* that Yaakov received.

Yaakov Avinu is about to leave Canaan, later to become Eretz Yisrael. Unlike Avraham, who had to leave for a short time due to famine, Yaakov's sojourn outside the land will be lengthy. The question he leaves with is how this will affect the connection with Hashem. Perhaps it is contingent upon living in the land. Outside, will he continue to enjoy divine guidance and direction?

Hashem answers the question: "Behold, I am with you; I will guard

you wherever you go, and I will return you to this soil; for I will not forsake you until I will have done what I have spoken about you" (*Bereishis* 28:15). Even outside of the land, Hashem would provide Yaakov with His personal supervision. And that supervision would be manifest in the specific form of a ladder. A ladder of prayer.

Abarbanel writes that the ladder of Yaakov's vision represented prayer, the angels climbing and descending it being angels of prayer – those who bring our prayers before Hashem and those who descend with the divine response. The guarantee of continued divine supervision was entrenched in prayer.

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THE PERTINENT PARASHA



This idea clearly emerges from the Torah's terminology. Yaakov Avinu terms the place where the vision occurred *Beis Elokim* – the House of God. This undoubtedly resonates with the Mikdash that Shlomo built, the “House for Hashem” that was also a house of prayer: “For My House will be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (*Yeshayah* 56:7). The famous *sefer* of the Mabit on prayer is appropriately named *Beis Elokim*.

Moreover, the word *makom*, “the place,” which occurs repeatedly in the passage of Yaakov's vision, is likewise dominant in the words of

When we feel lost, when we don't know where to turn, we need to remember that Hashem is there for us and awaits our prayers.

Shlomo at the inauguration of the Mikdash. The phrase “They shall pray to this place” is mentioned several times in the *pesukim* (I *Melachim* 8). Finally, Yaakov ends his response to the vision by recognizing “the gate of heaven” – the “gate” through which prayers enter.

The Midrash states that the ladder that Yaakov beheld was a personification of Yaakov himself; the connection between heaven and earth was a human connection. Like David Hamelech, who wrote, “I am a prayer” (*Tehillim* 109:4), so Yaakov himself was a prayer. His essence was the connection with Hashem. As he left the land, Hashem guaranteed that the connection would remain eternally – through prayer.

Today is a time for prayer. Scanning the words of Shlomo at the inauguration of the Mikdash, we find that prayer is related to hardship. In times of war, drought, plague, and famine, Shlomo pleaded that Jewish (and even non-Jewish) prayers passing through “this city,” “this place,” and “this House” should be heard.

We daven daily. We daven constantly. But according to the Ramban (*mitzvah* 5), the Torah concept of prayer applies specifically in times of hardship. When we feel lost, when we don't know where to turn, we need to remember that Hashem is there for us and awaits our prayers.

These torrid times of war are times for heartfelt prayer. Let us continue to pray, privately and as a community, with all our hearts. As Hashem revealed to Yaakov, the gates of heaven are forever open.



Hashkafically Speaking

Struggle and Success

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

“And Yaakov went out...”

I picture our father Yaakov leaving Be'er Sheva all alone. Following in the footsteps of his ancestors before him, he took a journey from southern Israel to Charan (which was located in the area of what is modern-day Turkey) to search for and find his marriage partner. He was around eighty years old at the time as he set out on this long sojourn all alone. His grandfather's emissary, Eliezer, had taken a similar journey to find a wife for Yaakov's father, Yitzchak. Eliezer had brought with him all the gear he could possibly need to be successful in his mission. He had taken with him camels and donkeys. He had plentiful stores of food and lots of money. He also brought with him the finest of jewelry. When he arrived at his destination as the ambassador of Avraham his master, he came with great dignity and fanfare and was afforded honor and respect.

By contrast, Yaakov had to go it alone. He had no servants, no money, no camels, and no gifts. He walked along the unpaved, daunting

desert paths unaccompanied. He was a penniless old man traversing the dark, frightening desert all by himself.

Yaakov looked around him and he saw the mountains of Judea. And then he said, “I lift up my eyes onto the mountains; from where will I get help?” The *Midrash Rabbah* comments on these words that Yaakov was really thinking about

Unlike Eliezer, Yaakov had to go it alone. He had no servants, no money, no camels, and no gifts.

his father and grandfather (based on a reading of the Hebrew term for “mountains,” *harim*, as “parents,” *horim*). Essentially, he was saying: My fathers had everything they needed to succeed in their journey. But I have nothing to take along. (In other words, when he said, “From where will I get help, *Me'ayin yavo ezri*,” what he meant was: “I have





Hashkafically Speaking

ayin, nothing). How will I survive?'

<<

As he contemplated his impoverished state, Yaakov said, "Can I give up on my Creator? Will He let me down? *Ezri me'im Hashem*. My help will come from Hashem, who created the heavens and the earth."

Avraham and Yitzchak taught the world about G-d's gifts. Yaakov taught the world how to use one's own life to create blessing and sanctify the world.

There are two paths to achieving G-dly success. There is the illuminated path, where G-d helps us by showering His abundance on us. The bounty flows upon us from Heaven and we must work with it to do His will and sanctify the world. In kabbalistic language this is referred to as *isarusa deleila*, an inspiration which begins above. There is another, perhaps greater, way to succeed, and that is when there is seemingly nothing forthcoming from above and we have to start the

success below, in this world. This is called *isarusa delesato*, inspiration which begins in this world. Yaakov's fathers before him merited *isarusa deleila*. Yaakov's mandate in this world was different. His job was to create God's blessings in this world. He had to begin the cycle from within himself. Avraham and Yitzchak taught the world about G-d's gifts. Yaakov taught the world how to use one's own life to create blessing and sanctify the world.

"With some, G-d brings their marriage partner straight to their doorstep; with others they must go out and seek. Yitzchak had his wife brought to him; Yaakov had to struggle and search for his mate" (*Midrash Rabba*).

On the one hand Yaakov's life was a struggle; on the other hand, Yaakov was the founder of the Jewish nation.

And as for us, sometimes we are showered with blessings. This is a gift from G-d, and we must be sure to always use those blessings responsibly and well. Sometimes we have to struggle for our blessings. When we achieve our goal we realize that G-d's gift to us was even greater. The blessing is ours and can never be taken away.



The Force of Custom in Monetary Law

Rabbi Asher Meir | Torah and Policy Researcher

In our *parasha*, Yaakov visits his uncle Lavan and makes a contract to wed Lavan's younger daughter, his cousin Rachel, in return for seven years of herding flocks. When Yaakov fulfills his part of the agreement, he asks Lavan to fulfill his own in return. A common understanding is that Lavan does something completely unexpected: he substitutes Leah for Rachel! The following day Yaakov is astonished to learn that he is married to Leah instead of Rachel.

But this version of events seems incomplete. Lavan emphasizes that the custom in Charan is to never marry the younger daughter before the older; indeed, the *poskim* emphasize that this custom has been prevalent among the Jewish people throughout the generations. (The Rashbam in *Bava Basra* 120a learns this from the daughters of Tzelofchad; Rabbeinu Tam in *Tosafot, Kiddushin* 52a, s.v. *vehilcheta*, considers this custom so strong that if a father betroths "my daughter" without specifying which one he means, it is not a doubtful betrothal; rather we assume that he had the eldest in mind so as not to go against this

custom.) Certainly after seven years in Charan Yaakov was aware of this insistence.

Furthermore, *Chazal* (*Bava Basra* 123a) inform us that Yaakov was so concerned that Lavan might switch brides that he confided to Rachel a secret sign that only she would know; Rachel, however, was concerned not to shame her sister and revealed the sign to Leah. So Yaakov could not have been very surprised at Lavan; at most he was disappointed that he had been outsmarted.

Based on these insights, the *Ohr Hachaim* suggests that Lavan had a firm basis in halacha for his conduct. When Yaakov made the deal, he probably presumed that Leah would be married within seven years. Since that didn't happen, he should have understood that it was useless to press Lavan to fulfill his agreement, since he was incapable of doing so. If despite the custom he demands that Lavan allow him to marry Rachel, Lavan reasons that Yaakov knows he is implicitly agreeing to first marry Leah himself.

Even if the custom is not so





MEKOM AVODA



binding as to create a valid implicit agreement, at the very least Yaakov should have understood that for Lavan to marry off Rachel before Leah would cause grave mortification for the entire family. Lavan had good reason to presume that Yaakov would never intend to bring disgrace on his family, and would after the fact agree to the logic of Lavan's scheme.

The Ohr Hachaim's explanation shows Rachel's actions in a new light. Giving the signs to her sister Leah appears to be a direct betrayal of Yaakov's trust; the agreement was precisely to inform Yaakov in the case that the bride was not Rachel! But revealing Lavan's scheme would not have caused shame only to Leah; Yaakov himself would have been shunned in Charan. There goes Yaakov - the brazen stranger who stubbornly insisted on enforcing his contract to the letter even at the expense of violating a community's ancient custom, a custom with the noble goal of guaranteeing that every family will do its utmost to marry off each and every daughter!

Why then did Yaakov become angry at Lavan for misleading him? The Ohr Hachaim suggests that Yaakov actually *did* accept the logic of Lavan's scheme. In fact, it was so understandable that there was no reason to resort to trickery! According to the Ohr Hachaim,

Yaakov complained that it would have been enough to merely explain to him why it was necessary for him to marry Leah first, and then everything would have been arranged amicably.

Note that Yaakov berates Lavan for surreptitiously switching the sisters, but he doesn't berate Rachel for disclosing the signs to her sister. We often find that the matriarchs had a better grasp of the complex web of social relations than the patriarchs did. Sarah alone figured out the impossibility of leaving Yishmael in the household; Rivka alone perceived the danger in giving the blessing to Esav. In both cases, the patriarchs deferred to the judgment of their wives: Hashem explicitly informs Avraham to listen to Sarah, and after Yitzchak figures out what has happened he affirms the blessing he gave to Yaakov. Perhaps Yaakov decoded this pattern and decided that if Rachel's judgment favored giving the signs to Leah, he should follow the example of his father and grandfather and defer to her judgment.

When we feel that someone close to us has betrayed our trust, it is worth at least considering if they might truly have our best interests in mind, but are just reading the situation in a different and perhaps even wiser way.



PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

From the Holy to the Mundane

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

One of the hardest transitions for the spiritually focused Jew is saying goodbye to the holy Shabbos and entering the mundane as we prepare to start anew in the remaining six days of the week. Similarly, closing the *sefer*, leaving the *beis midrash*, and heading out to work can present a challenge. An idea I heard from Rav Moshe Weinberger explaining the Kedushas Levi on this week's *parasha* gives us a fresh way to reframe this experience.

The Kedushas Levi grapples with the *pasuk* "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went (*vayelech*) to Charan." It seems that it would have been more appropriate for the Torah to have used a different word to describe leaving Eretz Yisrael, and that is *vayered*, which means "and he went down." The Kedushas Levi explains that this is the term that is classically employed when telling of someone leaving Eretz Yisrael. This is because leaving Eretz Yisrael, the most spiritually elevated place on earth, is considered a descent.

The Kedushas Levi answers that the Torah is highlighting that Yaakov had the ability to leave Eretz Yisrael without being negatively impacted. In his words: "When he left Be'er

Sheva splendor departed, which means that it went together with him, and the *kedusha* of Eretz Yisrael went with him.... Yaakov didn't experience a falling [spiritually] at all."

We have the ability to be strongly connected to Hashem wherever our jobs and lives may take us.

The trademark of a tzaddik is not being dependent on external circumstances. Without a doubt, the environment of Eretz Yisrael is spiritually elevating. Likewise, in our own lives, being immersed in the experience of Shabbos or learning Torah helps us feel more plugged in to Hashem. Still, as the children of Yaakov, we are called upon to be great people and follow in his footsteps. We have the ability to be strongly connected to Hashem wherever our jobs and lives may take us. Not only can we avoid being brought down by our environment,



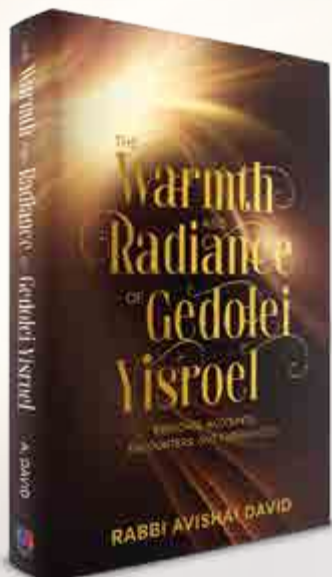
PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

but we can have a positive impact in all the places we go to and inspire the people we interact with wherever we are.

The spiritual boost of a Shabbos should power us up for a week of *avodas Hashem*. The time spent in the *beis midrash* each day should energize us to transform our work into an uplifting experience. We can replace fear with confidence. As we read about Yaakov's own personal transition from sitting in the *beis midrash* to going out to work, we can

see it as an invitation to reflect on our own work mindsets. Don't doubt your ability to achieve closeness to Hashem in any situation.

Rabbi Tzvi Broker is a career coach and runs the Work Inspired Chabura, a learning program for professional men to explore topics in parnassa. A new series, "Work How Hashem Intended" is starting after Chanuka. Join in person, via zoom, or get recordings. Contact pilznnoworkinspired@gmail.com for more info.



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"I was elated to see the precious *sefer* of my wonderful friend, Rav Avishai David, where he recounts what he saw and heard of his experiences with his teachers, the Gedolei Yisrael. It will bring inestimable *mussar*, wisdom, and *yiras Shamayim* to readers."

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Taking Interest

A Common *Ribbis*-Related Mistake

Rabbi Shloimy Muller

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

We've learned that a *heter iska* is the primary method employed to avoid *ribbis* between the customer and a bank when the bank is owned by Jews.

Let's discuss another bank-related issue that often leads to one of the most common *ribbis*-related mistakes. Aside from involving the actual transgression of *ribbis*, this mistake can also end up being very costly.

Consider the following true story. Mr. and Mrs. Berman (not their real names) have finally closed on the home of their dreams. The location and quality are exactly what they've been looking for. However, although the Bermans have a good, steady income, the bank refuses to approve the \$500,000 mortgage they need to close the deal.

Feeling desperate, Mr. Berman asks his brother-in-law, Tzvi, to sign on the mortgage and transfer the money to them. Of course, the Bermans will pay expenses involved and even sign on this with Tzvi. Tzvi graciously agrees, and when he is approved for the loan, he passes the money on to the Bermans. True to their word, the Bermans pay the mortgage monthly and on time.

At first glance, it seems like Tzvi has

done a wonderful *chesed*. *Mi ke'amcha Yisrael*. However, neither Tzvi nor the Bermans realize that they have unfortunately transgressed *ribbis min haTorah*. How so?

Let's break this down. Tzvi has borrowed \$500,000 from the bank with interest. This loan is okay, either by virtue of the bank being owned by non-Jews, or by the *heter iska* covering his loan. Now the money belongs exclusively to Tzvi.

He then passes this money on to the Bermans. This is a loan between him and the Bermans. And this loan was given on condition that the borrower repay with interest – classic *ribbis*!

The fact that the Bermans are simply covering Tzvi's expenses does not mitigate the severity of the reality that they are paying back their loan with *ribbis*. Neither does the fact that they may be making the payments directly to the bank and not to Tzvi's account. And although Tzvi took this loan only to help the Bermans, since he is the only borrower that the bank recognizes, the money he borrowed became his, and he lent it out with interest.

Next week, *be'ezras Hashem*, we will discuss this and similar issues and the possible solutions.



BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog

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

Last week we discussed the battles Rav Herzog fought in Eretz Yisrael to preserve religious observance there. This week we'll look at his part in rescuing Jewish orphans in postwar Europe, laying the physical foundations of what would become the State of Israel, and pleading the cause for a Jewish state on the world stage.

Following the war, in 1946, Rav Herzog embarked on a six-month mission to Europe to try to retrieve the estimated 10,000 Jewish children who were hidden in Christian homes and institutions. His first stop was Vatican City, where he met with Pope Pius XII. The pope agreed to help in the effort, but the assistance he provided was hardly sufficient. With a list of children prepared with the help of the Joint Distribution Committee, Rav Herzog traveled to France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Holland, and England. He managed to retrieve approximately 5,000 children – *half* of his original goal – 500 of whom Rav Herzog brought with him back to Israel.

One of the famous strategies he employed – which is attributed also to Rav Yosef Kahaneman and Rav Eliezer Silver, two other figures who worked to retrieve Jewish orphans after the Holocaust – was to recite *Shema Yisrael* in the orphanages, and see which children began to stir and look up, recalling how their parents would sing it to them.

During the trip, Rav Herzog's health began to decline. While in London in June, he was diagnosed with diabetes, and physicians recommended he reduce his work and pressure. But he deemed his mission too critical, and persisted, traveling to Eastern Europe. A native of Lomza, Poland, Rav Herzog was devastated upon seeing the rubble of what had been the Warsaw Ghetto. He later composed a stirring elegy lamenting the unfathomable loss.

Back home in Eretz Yisrael, Rav Herzog resumed his active involvement with the process of building and developing what would become the State of Israel. He forged an especially close relationship with the communities in Gush Etzion, a block of settlements in the region between Jerusalem and Chevron. He visited the communities frequently, lobbied the Mandate authorities on their behalf, and advised them regarding the halachos relevant to their agricultural activities, issues such as crossbreeding animals, Shabbos, and the septennial





BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY



observance of *Shemitta*.

In honor of Rav Herzog's fiftieth birthday, a new settlement was established in Gush Etzion (near what it is today Bat Ayin) named Masuot Yitzchak after the revered chief rabbi.

During one visit to Masuot Yitzchak on a Friday, his son, Yaakov, conveyed to him a message that local Arabs were planning an attack on the settlement the next day, on Shabbos. Yaakov pleaded with his father to return to his home in Jerusalem for Shabbos, but Rav Herzog replied, "If my children can remain here on Shabbos, then so can I." He remained in Masuot Yitzchak for Shabbos, and indeed, Arabs attempted an attack, only to be fended off by the Jewish security guards.

Spokesman of the Religion of Israel

Alongside his work to help lay the physical foundations for what would become the State of Israel, Rav Herzog also assumed the role of diplomat, passionately advocating on the Jews' behalf before the world.

In 1947, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) studied the situation in Palestine and made the recommendation to end the British Mandate and partition the territory into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The members of UNSCOP

arrived in Palestine in the summer, and on July 10, Rav Herzog delivered a two-hour speech to the committee, emotionally and eloquently petitioning for Jewish statehood. The following is an excerpt from his remarkable address:

The survival of the Jewish people represents a case which is sui generis. There is no parallel to a people preserving its laws and institutions, its language and traditions, its attachment to the land of its origin, and the hope of its eventual return and restoration during more than eighteen centuries of dispersal all over the globe . . . Jews they were, and Jews they remained wherever fate dispersed them. . . They never ceased to cling with their heart and soul to the country which for all time remained to them Eretz Israel, the land of Israel...

The first Hebrew Commonwealth was destroyed by the overwhelming might of the Chaldean empire. The bulk of the nation was carried into Babylonian captivity, but from the first hour of their exile they never ceased to pray for their return.... "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, Let my tongue cleave unto the roof of my mouth if I remember thee not, if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy."



Reconditioning Ourselves

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships Coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*

You really can't build a society without conditioning, and I will not suggest that we try. We must condition small children that brushing teeth is a good thing and bullying is a bad thing, that food off the floor is dirty and making your bed in the morning gets you a thumbs up. Without conditioning, there would be no parenting!

But as adults, we need to take a little look at some of the conditioned messaging we take for granted as truths. I first realized that I was conditioned when I went to the Far East. It had never crossed my mind that the correct response to seeing a cockroach was not "Yuck!" And here I was in a wonderful country where the response to cockroaches was "Yum!" It wasn't a question for me about which response is more correct. I've never eaten one, so I can't comment fairly about whether they are or aren't yum. It was a mind-blowing moment for me when I realized that my visceral yuck instinct was simply conditioning and that for thousands of people cockroaches are a rich source of protein and even a delicacy.

Think for Yourself

When we reassess our conditioning, i.e. the assumptions about life that we take for granted as being true, we have the wonderful opportunity to think for ourselves. We may agree wholeheartedly or reject certain assumptions, but at least we own our conclusions.

Conditioning starts at the beginning. As babies, we get handed to our mothers, who count that we have ten fingers and ten toes. We hear bedtime stories about princesses and princes falling in love, getting married and living happily ever after. We play with Kens and Barbies as we form a sense of what we should look like when we grow up. We draw pictures of houses with chimneys and gardens. We get asked what we will be when we grow up, and we dream of being successful adults. Do you see what's happening here? We are being conditioned to expect perfect lives.

Pause. Rewind.

Whoever said anything about perfect lives? Not every baby has ten fingers and ten toes. Falling in love is





often horribly painful. Not everybody gets married, and, of those who do, about 50% get divorced. Our bodies don't generally mature into Ken and Barbie as we stare in shock in the mirror, wondering why our bodies are refusing to cooperate. Most adults cannot afford to join the property market nowadays. We don't always win, and we often get rejected from the job we want. We don't expect curve balls like illness and loss.

Now I'm not suggesting that we all become pessimists and prepare our children for life by terrifying them with a list of potential calamities they should expect to deal with. But perhaps we would do well to stop equating our own sense of success with how perfect life is. How we deal with our challenges is a greater testimony to who we are than whether we duck them. When life does throw difficulty our way, it doesn't mean that things have gone wrong. It's part of the real life experience.

Imagine if we saw life as a slalom, not as a smooth ski run. We could shift our paradigm as to how we navigate it. Life is the hurdles, not the sprint. The point of life is who we become, not which difficulty we avoid. Imagine if we lived life not feeling like we failed when things don't go

the way we've been conditioned to think they should go. Imagine if we genuinely related to criticism as a tool for improvement. Imagine if we didn't expect to always feel great, and we learned to embrace our uncomfortable feelings as well as our comfortable ones. Imagine if we didn't view rejection as failure, and we didn't feel enormously thrown when things get challenging. How

Do you see what's happening here? We are being conditioned to expect perfect lives. Pause. Rewind.

would that affect our anxiety levels?

You can try really hard before a job interview but be okay with the knowledge that you might not get the job. Does that make you less anxious? Yes, probably. You can go on a date and know that it might lead to another and then again, it might not.

When we are completely committed to only one possible outcome and then go ahead and attach our self-esteem to attaining it, the idea of not





achieving it fills us with anxiety. But if every time we make a mistake we see ourselves as learning something, if every time a relationship doesn't work out we view ourselves as having grown from it, if every conflict or difficulty we encounter is an opportunity to deepen ourselves, we would reduce our fear of things going wrong because we would not see those experiences as wrong.

Imagine if we lived life not feeling like we failed when things don't go the way we've been conditioned to think they should go.

What if the answer to the questions of when will you get married, what job will you have, how many kids will you have, what kind of house will you live in, how old will you be when you die is actually, "How could I possibly know?" And what if the answer to the question, "How are

you?" did not always have to be, "Fine, thank you," but could also be, "I'm not so fine today"? We may find that life's surprises are not only to be expected but to be welcomed.

Human Progress

Perhaps two steps forward and one step back is not just a consoling platitude but the way human beings actually progress. Because perfection and growth are mutually exclusive. Growth requires a change of status quo, a deepening, a dynamic story of ups and downs, welcome successes and necessary failures. Perfection requires the good things to stay exactly as they are.

Being conditioned to anticipate perfection is not only a shattered expectation in the making and a recipe for anxiety, but it also deprives us of the deep and meaningful pleasure of being open to the pleasures – and sometimes pain – of dancing the dance of life as we discover our own ability to engage with it, as it is.



Ma'aser on Money for Camp Canteen?

Josh and Tammy Kruger

Once upon a time in an overnight summer camp:

"Mail time!"

Joseph's friend Danny entered the cabin with a large bag and began distributing letters and packages to the other campers. Joseph was pretty engrossed in his book and barely noticed when a thick envelope was tossed onto his bed.

"Looks like you got a good one, Joe. It feels heavy."

Joseph looked up from his book, "Thanks, Danny! Ooh, this does look interesting."

He opened it up and pulled out some pieces of his favorite snacks – bubblegum and chocolate. He also pulled out an unexpected \$20 bill. With an excited smile, he reached for the letter inside. It was from his mom, who told him that she was sending the money for him to put

into his canteen account to last for the rest of the summer. Each camper was allowed to choose a treat every day from the canteen, and the price of the treat was subtracted from the amount the camper had in his canteen account.

One of the other campers called out with a laugh "Don't forget to give *ma'aser* on your earnings, Joe."

Danny joined in, "Hey, Joe, I'll take the *ma'aser* from you. My last camp package had only vitamins and a tube of toothpaste in it. I have no money left for junk food, and this is my last chocolate bar. I'm chocolate-poor! Your two dollars will be put to good use."

Joseph smiled. Then he paused. Maybe he was supposed to give *ma'aser* on the money. Maybe he could even give the *ma'aser* to chocolate-poor Danny. He left the cabin to find the camp rabbi.

Discussion:

Q: What is *ma'aser*?

A: *Ma'aser* is an important practice of giving 10% of our money to *tzedaka*. This means that if we made \$10 from a babysitting job or shoveling someone's snow, then we should give \$1 to *tzedaka*.

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

A: In this week's *parasha*, Yaakov flees from his home hopefully to find safety in the land of Charan with his uncle Lavan. On the way, he makes a promise that if Hashem takes care of him, then he will give 10% of whatever he earns to Hashem (*Bereishis* 28:22).

Q: Does Joseph have to give *ma'aser*?





PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



A: No. When someone receives a gift for a specific purpose – to buy school books or a bike or a bus pass – then they do not have to give *ma'aser*. We assume the giver decided exactly how much money was needed to purchase the particular object. If the receiver gives *ma'aser*, he will not have enough money to buy what the giver wanted.

A person who receives a concrete gift (not money) does not need to give *ma'aser* from his gift (*Derech Emunah, Matnos Ani'im* 7:27; *Shut Shevet Halevi*, Vol. 5, no. 133, sec. 7), and money to buy a specific item has the same status as the item itself. However, if the giver just gives the money and does not specify how it

is to be spent, then the receiver is obligated to give *ma'aser*.

In our story, Joseph's mother clearly stated in her letter that the money was specifically to be spent on food from the canteen. Therefore, Joseph does not have to give *ma'aser* on it.

If the money would have been given without designating a specific purpose, Danny would not have been a suitable option for *ma'aser* allocation. Although Danny is chocolate-poor, he is not really poor, because his parents cater to his needs. *Ma'aser* is reserved for the poor and not for the chocolate-poor!

Back to Our Story:

Joseph was quite pleased with the explanation that the camp rabbi gave. He went to the canteen to deposit the full \$20, as his mother had requested. Later, he returned to the cabin with a chocolate bar, sat down beside Danny, and said "Maaser or no maaser, Mom always taught me to share."

He proceeded to break off a generous piece off his chocolate bar and give it to his 'chocolate-poor' friend.

"Thanks!" said Danny. "And to show you that I can be a good sport too, I'd like to share my toothpaste with you when we're finished with the chocolate."

They both had a good laugh.



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



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