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| SCHOLARS FOSTER PEACE |

"Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Chanina said, 'Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: 'And all your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children' (Isaiah 54:13).' If all the children of Israel are taught of the Lord, there will be peace for all' (Brachos 64a).

Torah scholars foster peace: They are unconcerned with peer competition so contention is reduced. They work less, enabling increased Torah study. They live humbly and of low profile, never becoming targets of other peoples' aggression or jealousy. Lack of egotism eliminates their Lashon Hara and leads to helping mankind. They make others happier by teaching them that fame and fortune does not lead to happiness. They set an example for the world. They enlighten the community to the pleasure of God's Torah brilliance. When wisdom is prioritized, this captivates people, leaving them no energy or interest in petty matters leading to unrest.

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

No Quick Fixes

READER: I want to know how rational Torah principles can help with finding the right soul mate. I have heard about segula (amulets) and Tehillim in finding the right partner. But it seems inconsistent [with Torah values] and it's very difficult to hit at the right guidance in this increasingly secularized world.

—Nora Esom

RABBI: Talmud Sanhedrin 101a rebukes the recital of Torah verses for some personal gain. Torah cannot

be utilitarian. Torah is to be studied, without ulterior motive. Thus, reciting Tehillim (Psalms) with the intent that it locates a spouse or generates some changes in our lives, is prohibited. Even King David—Tehillim's author—did not recite Tehillim when his infant was dying. King David fasted and prayed (Samuel II, 12:16, 12:22). Certainly we must not contradict Tehillim's author.

Lamentations 3:40 says our response to need is to "Search and examine our ways, and turn back to the

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Lord.” This means that the evil and negative events we encounter in our lives, is mostly self-inflicted. Maimonides teaches the same. Segula and Tehillim recitation are not Torah’s prescription for success, and express an idolatrous emotion, that incantations and amulets change the world. But that is not how God designed the world’s operation...

God employs a system of nature, where our intelligent acts comply with the universe and we meet with success. When acting intelligently, like seeking a wife based on her admirable qualities and humility, or a husband based on his Torah education and practice, we seek proper character that leads to happier marriages than not seeking such qualities. This is a natural result, and how the world operates. And when living by Torah guide-lines and also praying, God may step in as He did for Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, and immediately provided Rivka for Isaac.

Thus, God designed this world where natural and intelligent choices comply with the world’s workings and lead to success, and also where God rewards those who follow Torah. That’s all that exists: nature and God. There are no other powers. Abandon useless amulets and Tehillim.

Maimonides harshly criticized those people who used a mezuzah as an amulet, saying they have no share in the world to come:

But these (people) who write on the inside of the mezuzah the names of angels or sanctified names or passages or seals, they are in the category of those who have no world to come. Because it is not enough that these fools have taken a command and nullified it, but they rendered a great command—the Unity of God, the love of Him and the worship of Him—as if it’s an amulet for personal benefit and they assume in their foolish hearts that this will give them pleasure in their futilities of this world (Laws of Tefillin 5:4). ■

Where is it in Torah?

READER: Having just finished reading the Five Books of Moses, I have a couple of questions regarding authenticity:

1) How can there be an Oral Torah as it is not mentioned in the Written Torah?

- 2) Where does it mention about milk or meat?
- 3) Where does it mention about having a mikveh?
- 4) Where are the festivals Purim & Hanukkah mentioned?
- 5) Where is it mentioned we need to wear a tallit, it only mentions tzitzit. Also women?
- 6) Where does it mention tefillin?
- 7) Where does it mention the lighting of the Sabbath Candles?

Thank you in advance for any return email regarding these questions.

–Elliot Taylor
Birmingham, UK

RABBI: Responding in order:

1) Maimonides’ introduction to the Mishneh Torah states:

“All of the commandments which were given to Moses on Sinai were given together with their oral explanation for, it is said: ‘And I will give thee the tables of stone, and the Torah and the commandment’ (Exod. 24:12.); the [word] Torah [refers to] Holy Writ; and the [word] commandment [refers to] the Oral Explanation. Moreover, He commanded us to observe the Torah by the word of the commandment; thus it is this commandment which is called Oral Torah.”

Ibn Ezra writes identically: “The Torah” is the Written Law and “the commandment” is the Oral Law, as all the commandments were given to Moses on Sinai during the days that Moses was on the mountain” (Ibn Ezra, Exod. 24:12)

2) The prohibition to eat milk and meat are derived from the 3 times this phrase appears in Torah: “Do not cook the kid in its mother’s milk” (Exod. 23:19, Exod. 34:26, Deut. 14:21). One verse applies to eating this mixture, one to cooking it, and one to gaining benefit from this mixture.

3) Mikveh is derived from the many commands to immerse in water.

4) Purim and Chanukah are rabbinic and therefore are not found in the Written Law. But the rabbis have license to formulate those and other laws (Deut 17:11).

5) Tallis is the identical mitzvah of tzitzis, with the requirement that the garment be of a certain size. As this law is time bound (daytime), it is not obligatory on women.

6) Tefillin are mentioned Exod 13:9, 16.

7) Sabbath Candles too are rabbinic and are not found in the Written Law. ■

Why Are We Here?

The Answer is in the Gold Ark

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



On more than one occasion, I have heard sermons addressing the Tabernacle, where the Rabbi apologizes for its “dry nature” or his difficulty in presenting exciting ideas. The Jerusalem Talmud (Shviy-is 2b) says: “It [Torah] is not a vain matter from you (Deut. 32:47), and if it is, then ‘from you’ it is vain.” The Talmud addresses the usage of “from you” to mean this: Moses taught, if you view any part of Torah as vain or empty, it is due to your own shortcomings; you are the cause for not seeing the gems within the verses.

In his opening chapter of Hilchos Bais Habechira, Maimonides says one of the essential principles governing the Temple’s construction is a room called the “Holy of Holies.” Yet, in the very next law when listing the various vessels, the Ark—the centerpiece of this Holy of Holies—is glaringly absent from the list! How can the room called an “essential principle” take precedence over its content, it centerpiece?

Even in chapter 4 when Maimonides addresses the Ark, he focusses on the chambers in which it was to be hidden upon the prophesied destruction of the Temple. He does not focus on the Ark’s measurements as he did regarding the other vessels. How do we explain this second omission? And why was the Ark—and no other vessel—hidden? What is this unique character of the Ark?

Hilchos Klay Hamikdash (chap. 2) addresses the incense. After formulating 11 laws governing this incense, Maimonides includes 2 final laws concerning the carrying of the Ark restricting transporting the Ark via wagon or animal, and that it must be carried by man, with their faces towards the Ark, and not to remove its poles. Why are these 2 laws grouped with the incense?

What is the meaning of the medrash that the Ark did not occupy any measurement? The Holy of Holies was 20 cubits square. Yet, if one measured from any side of the Ark to the wall, he measured 10 cubits. This means the Ark did not diminish space. What is the need for such a miracle, and what is the lesson?

Maimonides states that the Ark rested upon the Evven Shesiyah (a stone) from which the formation of the Earth took place. Of what relevance is this stone to the Ark?

Exodus 30:36 concerning the incense: “...and you shall place of it in front of the Testimony (the Ark containing the Tablets of Testimony) in the Tabernacle where I meet you there...” The problem is that the incense altar is not in front of the Ark. It is furthest removed from it, and also, the Ark is behind the Parochess curtain. In what manner is the incense burned “in front” of the Ark? One answer addresses all questions...

Sforno teaches God command man to build the Tabernacle as a response to the sin of the Gold Calf; a concession to man's nature. The Jews expressed an inability to relate to God purely abstractly. They said, “Moshe, the man who took us out of Egypt, we know not what has happened to him” (Exod. 32:1). They were crippled by the loss of Moshe; a tangible relationship with God. Thus, they created the Gold Calf as a replacement. God's response to this sin was to offer man a highly structured approach to his religious life, intended to prevent another Gold Calf catastrophe. The Temple is replete with laws governing each move made by the priests. God allowed tangible religious practice, but inhibited man's outlet of his religious emotions, as expressed when creating the Calf. He must conform to God's will and not imagine he knows how to approach God, as sinfully expressed in the Gold Calf.

Thus, the centerpiece of Tabernacle is the Ark; an object housing the

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Law, which reflects God's wisdom, and His angels that deliver knowledge to man. But this law is in a room—the Holy of Holies—a room “off-limits.” No one may enter, lest he suffer death, except the high priest on Yom Kippur. The purpose of this restriction parallels the restriction on the Jews to ascend Mount Sinai at Revelation. Man must demonstrate that God is “unapproachable,” or unknowable. Man forfeits his life if he feels he can approach God, or thinks there is something tangible about the Creator, as seen in Aaron’s two sons who were killed for approaching God without being commanded, and seen in the Jews during the Gold Calf event, and the Jews who opened the Ark upon its return from the Philistines. And when Moses first erected the Tabernacle, Sforno says he first suspended the curtain, and only afterwards erected the beams under the curtain. That’s counterintuitive, but it teaches Tabernacle’s primary lesson: a veil exists between man and God. Gold Calf sinners imagined they grasped how to relate to God. Tabernacle and Temple correct error this by imposing a veil over our thoughts. We cannot know what God is or how to relate to Him, without His instruction. We must always view this curtain that hides God.

In addition to this room's restriction, God commanded us in the daily incense. When the priest enters the Tabernacle, he is first confronted with the incense altar. Although spatially distanced from the Ark and separated by a curtain, the incense created a cloud, between the priest and the Ark, a veil between us and God. In this sense, the incense is “in front” of the Ark. It is amazing how the verse indicates this central concept.

Although the design of the Tabernacle indicates a veil between man and God, simultaneously, we must never lose focus of a life of searching out God; a life pursuing wisdom. Therefore, the carrying of the Ark on man's shoulders while facing it, and not placing it on wagons or animals, all target one idea: we must never lose focus of our primary objective: the pursuit of God's wisdom. These two ideas—God's unapproachable nature and life's focus on wisdom—are two sides of one coin, and appropriately joined in Maimonides' laws of Klay Hamikdash. The philosophy of incense—the veil between God and man—and carrying the Ark, belong together. For it is in the transport of the Ark that one might view it as luggage or dormant. Not so. Wisdom is to be engaged at all times. The Ark is to be viewed and cared for always. We must never lose focus of God's wisdom or treat it lightly, as in transporting the Ark on wagons or animals.

This also explains why King Solomon commanded the Ark be concealed. It is not something that man can approach. No other vessel was meant to teach this lesson, so no others were hidden upon the Temple's destruction. Perhaps also the Holy of Holies is formulated as primary to the Tabernacle, and not the Ark. For it is the concept of “restricted area” that conveys our ignorance of God's nature. In that law (Bais Habechira 1:5) Maimonides also includes the laws of creating a courtyard around the Tabernacle, for this too intends

to limit one's approach. It is the approach that is the central lesson, not the object we approach.

What is the meaning of the medrash that the Ark did not occupy any measurement? The Holy of Holies was 20 cubits square. Yet, if one measured from any side of the Ark towards any wall, he measured 10 cubits. The Ark did not diminish space on this room! What is the need for such a miracle? What is the lesson? Perhaps this teaches that wisdom is not of this world. Yes, it is reflected in all of God's creations, but the physical world is a “result” of that metaphysical wisdom, and not a “location” of wisdom. The fact the Ark did not take up measurable space makes it akin to wisdom, directing us to this further realization or a world of wisdom “outside” earthly confines.

Maimonides omits the Ark in his list of the Tabernacle's vessels, as the Ark is not utilitarian. A vessel on the other hand is used, as were the altars, the Table, and the Menorah. Ark does not “service” the Tabernacle. Unlike other objects, the Ark's poles were never removed (Exod. 25:15). And unlike all other objects whose length ran parallel to the Tabernacle's length to compliment the Tabernacle, the Ark was positioned within its length running perpendicular to the Tabernacle's length (Bais Habechira 3:12). These laws express that the Ark was not subordinate to the Tabernacle; it found no greater purpose in the Tabernacle, as if it “arrived at its destination.” Retaining the



Earth's Foundation Stone

poles in the Ark rejected this error. So essential is this lesson of the Ark's poles, that the Prophets refer to them (Kings I 8:7, 8). Nor was the Ark subordinate, to enhance the Tabernacle, which would be expressed had it copied the Tabernacle's length. No. The opposite is true: Tabernacle existed for the Ark which housed Torah. Ark, which is synonymous with God's wisdom, is the ultimate objective of human life. The Ark cannot find any greater purpose in the Tabernacle, just as wisdom finds no ulterior purpose than itself. This is man's purpose, to learn for the sake of learning: “Torah Lishma.” This is the culminating lesson of Pirkei Avos. This is human perfection.

Finally, the Ark rested upon the Even Shesiyah—Earth's Foundation Stone. This relationship teaches the purpose of the Earth. Without man's pursuit of wisdom—what Ark represents—the Earth fails to realize its purpose. The Earth's very formation, is to foster the existence of the one physical creature capable of perceiving God. ■



THE VIRTUE OF SILENCE

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Judaism teaches that one ought to be moderate and careful in one's speech; and seek to reduce the quantity of words that stream from his mouth. According to the Rambam in Hilchot Deiot 2:4,

"A person should increase silence and refrain from speaking, except in matters of wisdom and practical necessities... The Rabbis said ' whoever engages in excessive speech brings on sin. And they further said, 'I have not found anything as good for one's body as silence.'"

The contemporary culture is clearly at odds with this philosophy. It extols the external visible personality features, such as charm and smooth-speech. In fact, a recent President with little in the way of solid achievement to recommend him, came to national prominence on the basis of his exceptional oratorical talent.

The superficial culture of the times has brought about the phenomenon, of people in the entertainment industry uttering "sage" insights on serious matters which are beyond their realm of expertise.

In fact, it is interesting to note how many entertainers—including athletes—have taken to growing beards. Why would they seek to adopt a "look" which is more appropriate to "Charedi" Jews?

In my opinion, it is because they are not satisfied to be applauded for their performance skills. They want people to believe, that they have more to offer than mere entertainment. Indeed, they fancy themselves as very profound people, whose insights on all matters should be considered.

Look at the Academy Awards which no one watches anymore; because, among other things, one must put up with pompous actresses and bearded actors pontificating on all types of political matters, on which they have really nothing to offer. Silence would serve them well. They would be well advised, in the words of Laura Ingraham, to just "shut up and sing."

Recently, Whoopi Goldberg (who chose a Jewish sounding name to bolster her career—how's that for cultural appropriation?) landed herself in hot water, for some reckless speech. I have often said, that man's tongue is his own worst enemy.

Whoopi hurt herself, by denying that the

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Holocaust was a racial phenomenon, but was rather “merely” a manifestation of “man’s inhumanity to man.” No question it was man’s inhumanity, but isn’t that kind of putting it mildly?

“Brutality” is a better term in that context, and “bestiality” is closer to the truth. But you get the point; anyone remotely familiar with the gruesome facts of the Shoah, will find it very difficult to crystallize what happened, with any particular word. There are simply, no words. As Elie Wiesel explained, we need a new language to adequately talk about it.

Whoopi’s utterance, was greeted with instant (righteous and self-righteous) indignation. Who could pass on the opportunity to jump on the bandwagon of safe (politically correct) condemnation? But, she was clearly asking for it. Her statement, displayed an astonishing ignorance of even the most rudimentary facts regarding: Hitler, Nazism and the Holocaust.

The entire program of destruction, was based on the Fuehrer’s assertion that Aryans constituted a superior race; and that in order to retain the “purity” of their blood and culture, they had to ruthlessly eradicate all inferior races—chief among them the Jews. Whoopi, all you had to do was ask.

There is, however, no need to revel in her embarrassment. I don’t think she meant any harm, but her ignorance brought her down. This frequently happens, and could easily happen to any one of us. She is not the only one to give voice to stupid things. We all do, but because we are unknowns we can avoid that kind of fallout.

Jason Greenblatt of the ADL, offered the official reprimand; and she immediately had him on her show and issued a mea culpa. Let’s give her credit for that. She had the integrity to acknowledge her mistake and make amends with her apology—which I take to be sincere. All’s well that ends well. We’ll see...

What lesson can be learned from this unforced blunder? Is there a takeaway, that could be helpful to us in our own lives? I believe, this should cause us to have renewed appreciation for the teaching of our Sages, on the matter of excessive speech.

We should guard our words as we do our money, and exercise restraint and caution in this area. Let us train ourselves, to increase our thought-to-verbalization ratio; we can thereby, save ourselves from a great deal of unnecessary embarrassment. If we educate ourselves to speak only after we have given the matter a great deal of thought and consideration, we will become wiser and more effective people.

The Torah, records the full text of the discussion between Eliezer and Rivka’s family, because, “even the plain talk of the servants of the Patriarchs is beloved to Hashem.” May we merit to reach the level, where our ordinary conversations are worthy of being listened to and learned from.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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Judging Value by Appearances

Rabbi Richard Borah

The idea of judging a person's value by his or her appearance is often cited as being unwise. Aphorisms abound regarding the perils of this method of assessment:

"Don't judge a book by its cover"; "All that glitters is not gold"; "Looks can be deceiving". In the "Woman of Valor" reading that is traditionally sung before the Friday night Sabbath meal we say:

"Grace is elusive and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears God -- she shall be praised."

We understand that a person can have a horrendous character or a disturbed, dysfunctional mind and still appear beautiful. And yet, these aphorisms attest to the natural inclination we have to placing too much stock in a beautiful appearance or a charming persona. What is curious is that in the Torah this week we also see what appears to be a major emphasis on appearances and beauty regarding the Kohane Gadol (the High Priest) and his required clothing and bodily form. As we learn, either bodily deformities and any lack in the priest's designated clothing would disqualify him from carrying out his priestly duties.

In the parsha of Tetzaveh the Torah describes the distinguishing of the Kohanim and the Leviim and the requirement for their unique clothing:

And you bring near to yourself your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the

children of Israel to serve Me [as kohanim]: Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

You shall make holy garments for your brother Aaron, for honor and glory.

Maimonides ("The Rambam") explains in the "Guide for the Perplexed":

Also, in order to exalt the Temple, the rank of its servants was exalted, the Priests and Levites were singled out, and the Priests wore the most splendid, finest, and most beautiful garments: Holy garments...for splendor and for beauty" (Exodus: 28:2). And it was commanded that someone who has a blemish should not be employed in divine service; not only one who is afflicted with an infirmity, but also those afflicted with deformities are disqualified from being Priests (Vayikra 21:16-21) as is explained in the regulations of legal science dealing with this commandment (Mishnah, Berachot 7). For to the multitude an individual is not rendered great by his true form (the rational soul or intellect) but by the perfection of his limbs and the beauty of his clothes; and what is aimed at is that the Temple and its servants should be regarded as great by all. (Guide, Book 3, Chapter 45)

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The Rambam explains here that the distinguishing and separating out of the “Priests and the Levites” from the other Jewish people is for the purpose of “exalting” or bringing honor to the Temple. It seems that were this not required, then the functions that the Kohanim and the Leviim served could have been carried out by the Jewish people in general. Having the Jewish people observe these designated and privileged groups (privileged to serve in the Temple and to receive the gifts of the sacrifices) created through association, honor for the Temple which, as the Rambam has stated, replaces the idolatrous temples with one that reflected the one true God. So, it seems, the Kohanim and the Leviim were a means to bringing respect to the Temple and the Temple was a means to bringing honor to God.

The Rambam also explains here that the requirements of Kohane having a normal, healthy body and the special clothing of the kohanim were also for the purpose of creating respect and honor for the Kohanim in the eyes of all the people. The Rambam notes that the people, in general, err in judging a person by their physical attractiveness and their clothing as opposed to their true nature (the quality of their wisdom / understanding). But this being the case, the Kohanim were provided with special clothing and the High Priest was provided with the most beautiful and special clothing of all. But, the Rambam seems to hold that this clothing and the requirements of a healthy, normal body without defect would not be needed if all the people were wise and discerning. The term used in translation for the people that require this concession is “the multitude” implying something of a derogatory statement. I would equate multitude with the term “masses”.

So for the Rambam, there is no doubt that the physical normality and special clothing required of the kohanim is not because these are of true value or reflect the essential nature of the kohanim. But the Rambam explains that as it is a natural tendency is most people to attribute these qualities with something or someone of greater value, the Torah concedes to human nature and actually uses this common misconception in order to inculcate a respect and exalted assessment of the kohanim and the Temple service, both of which reflect the service of God which is at the pinnacle of the Jew's true value system.

In contrast to the Rambam's description of the Kohane Gadol's appearance as being a concession to the “multitude's” need for beautiful appearance due to their miscon-



ception of what is truly important, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “The Rav” described the recitation of the Avodah by his father and grandfather in the essay “Before Hashem” this way:

They said it with so much enthusiasm, such ecstasy, that they could not stop. They were no longer in Warsaw or Brisk; they were transported to a different reality. Although I am not a musician or musicologist, all one had to do was hear the niggun (tune) of “HaKohanim V'ha'am” to understand....Toward the end of the Avodah, when the scarlet turned white, the piyyut describes how the nation exuded happiness, expressing pleasure and delight, a feeling of closeness to Hashem....The description of the Avodah culminates in this majestic piyyut “Maray Kohane” which describes the luminous appearance of the Kohane Gadol after successfully completing the Avodah. Why the happiness in reciting “Maray Kohane” (“The Appearing of the Kohane”) ? Why was it sung with such a happy tune? The answer is that the Kohen reflected the radiance of the Shechinah. Through witnessing the radiant appearance of the Kohen Gadol, there could be no doubt about Hashem's acceptance of Klal Yisrael's prayer (Before Hashem 148-149)

The Rav, in this explanation, gives a greater significance to the requirement of the Kohane Gadol's (High Priest's) illustrious appearance. It is not only to bring honor to the Temple, but the Kohane Gadol functions, so to speak, to represent the Shechinah (the Divine Presence), during the Temple Avodah Service and, as such, his appearance must reflect, on a human scale that which is most perfect and most beautiful. The Rav also gave the following explanation regarding the

changing of the clothing or “vestments of the High Priest “Kohane Gadol” during the Avodah service of Yom Kippur and its description in the language of the Musaf Avodah Service of the Yom Kippur Services. The Rav states:

“He would remove his clothes, immerse himself”: The Kohen Gadol immersed himself five times on Yom Kippur. The first immersion was required in order to purify him, changing his status from “tamai” (impure) to “tahur” (pure), just as anyone who enters the Temple must first immerse himself, as stated by the Gemara in Yoma (30a). The other four immersions, on the other hand, were required in order to sanctify the Kohen Gadol as he was elevated to higher levels of holiness. (Noraot HaRav, Volume 6, pp. 31-34)

The Rav also explains the Kohen Gadol's putting on of the golden vestments on Yom Kippur. The Rav states:

“And don golden vestments”: The clothing worn by the Kohen Gadol allowed him to fulfill the imperative of dressing “for the honor and splendor”, the very purpose of the priestly garments, as identified in the Torah (Shemot 28:2). As a result, the Kohen Gadol provided a form of atonement every moment that he wore the eight vestments of gold, since each of the eight pieces of clothing, as explained by the Gemara in Zevachim (89b), provided atonement for different sins committed by Jewish people. (Noraot HaRav, Volume 6, p. 64)

In conclusion, I would say that if we are wise we should always be careful not to be swayed in our assessment of a person or place by its appearance. Samuel 1, 16:7 states: “Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature, for I have rejected him.” The cruelest people and the most evil of institutions can and do often have beautiful appearances and elegant ways. However, one must understand in viewing others and in presenting oneself to others, that there are definitely situations where one must use appearances to bring people to accurately value something or someone which is of true worth. Here, appearance is being used to convey a truth, and not for deceptive purposes. The case of the appearance of the High Priest in the Temple is such an example. ■

Science of Mitzvah

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

If one's father tells him to give him water to drink, and that son also has in his hand [1] another mitzvah to perform, if the other mitzvah can be performed by others, it should be done by them, and the son should involve himself in honoring his father. For we do not push aside one mitzvah because of another one. And if there are no others to perform that other mitzvah, the son should perform that mitzvah, and put aside honoring his father, because he and his father are obligated in mitzvah. And the study of Torah is greater than honoring one's parents.

(Maimonides: Hilchos Mamrim 6:13)

On the surface, this seems plain to understand. But a few questions enlighten us to a deeper formulation of Torah's commands and man's obligations.

Let's assume the other mitzvah is helping his friend David move some furniture. The son's obligation to honor his father over helping David indicates that honoring fathers is of greater value. Perhaps this is because that mitzvah devolves exclusively upon the son. That is, when you are the only one who can perform a mitzvah, that takes precedence over a mitzvah equally performed by all. This ensures more mitzvahs are fulfilled; thereby the greater good for all is realized. Alternatively, honoring one's father is of greater importance, as this leads to accepting the True Authority. This explains the inclusion of honoring parents in the first set of the 10 Commandments, laws pertaining to God.

Now, although a third person—Jacob—is present to help David move his furniture, how is the son honoring his father not an act of “pushing aside” helping David? Apparently the son need not “personally” help David. The obligation is “Do not allow a mitzvah to be pushed aside,” and as Jacob helps David, that mitzvah is not pushed aside. There was no greater obligation upon the son to help David, than upon anyone else. The mitzvah of helping David is not that, “This person must help David,” but rather, “David must be helped.” Thus, the son has Jacob help David, and the son proceeds to honor his father.

But what if the son alone is present? In this case, as the son is the only one who can help David, that mitzvah cannot be avoided. This is the expression of “For we do not push aside one mitzvah because of another one.” For if the son honors his father, David is not helped and that mitzvah is pushed aside. But why doesn't Maimonides give that reason, instead of “because he and his father are obligated in mitzvah”? Should not the principle “We do not push aside” suffice for the son helping David, and not his father?

It appears, as we said, that certain mitzvahs do not devolve upon one person over an other.

Mitzvah does not demand that John perform X, but rather, that X be performed, and those aware must respond. Therefore, the father too is obligated to ensure that David is helped! This now creates an interesting phenomenon, where the honor due to the father is compromised. How so? The father's obligation to help David renders him as one who must be “active,” and cannot be “passive” to receive his son's honor. At this moment that David needs help, the father's obligation suspends the son's ability to honor him. For this reason Maimonides gives the reasoning “He and his father are obligated in mitzvah” and not “We do not push aside one mitzvah,” since the mitzvah to honor the father is inactive until David is helped.

Why does Maimonides conclude with, “And the study of Torah is greater than honoring one's parents”? This appears to contradict “We do not push aside a mitzvah.”

Torah study overriding honoring parents is validated by Jacob not violating Honoring Parents for the 14 years he studied under Shame and Ever [2]. Jacob acted correctly and the mishnah [3] and talmud [4] validate this too. But this is only when one is already engaged in Torah study. But if one is engaged in honoring one's father, the son does not cease that honor to study Torah. “We do not push aside a mitzvah” applies only once engaged in a mitzvah [5]. This can be explained as a practical principle, that to fulfill a mitzvah, one must be alleviated of all other responsibility. Otherwise, a series of mitzvahs can successively devolve upon a person, where each succeeding mitzvah causes one to cease the previous mitzvah, thereby never completing any mitzvah.

That sins vary in their punishments, and that mitzvahs too have degrees of vitality clearly teaches that Torah commands are not of equal importance. How then does Pirkei Avos say to “Run to perform a smaller command just like a greater command”? The talmud [6] says not to select one command over another: when alone and confronted with a command, fulfill it even if a greater command then confronts you. Here is when we apply “Run to perform a smaller command just like a greater command.” But if not alone, and one can give a lesser command to another, he should opt to fulfill the greater command. ■

[1] “In his hand” does not mean this mitzvah is obligatory upon the son alone, but that “the son has the capacity to fulfill.”

[2] Megilla 16b

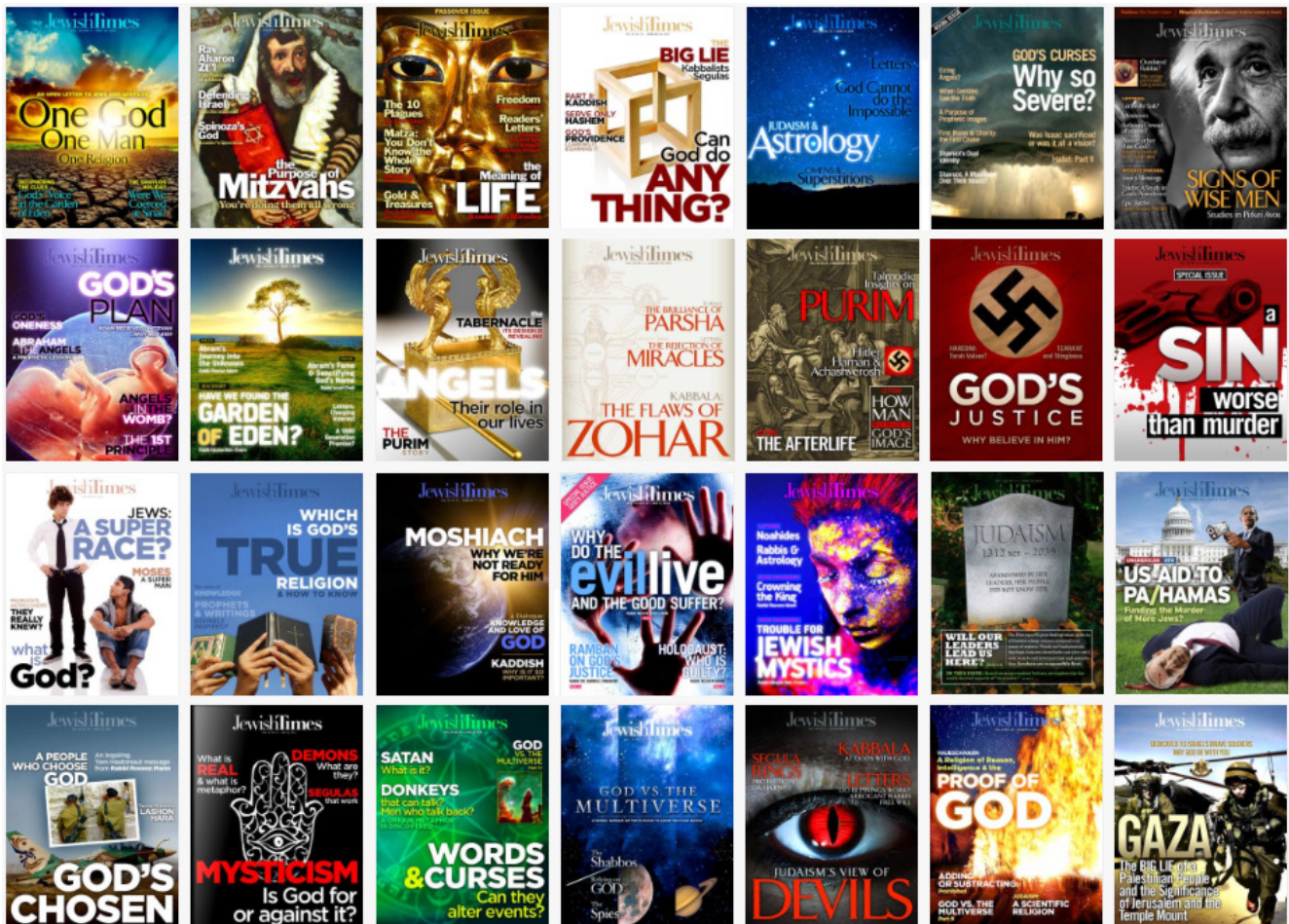
[3] “These are the matters that have no measure: Peah, first fruits, appearance at Temple, works of kindness, and Torah study. These are the matters whose product a person eats in this world and whose capital remains for him in the future world: Honoring father and mother, works of kindness, making peace between people; the study of Torah corresponds to them all” (Peah 1:1).

[4] Moade Kattan 9b

[5] Megilla, Rabbeinu Nissim 13b

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Rabbi Bernie Fox

Shedding Light on the MENORA

“And you should command Bnai Yisrael and they should take to you pure oil from crushed olives for the lamp to ignite a constant light” (Sefer Shemot 27:20)

I. Pure oil for the Menorah

This pasuk opens Parshat Tetzaveh. Hashem directs Moshe to command Bnai Yisrael to provide pure olive oil for the Menorah. The oil used for the Menorah is special. It was of the highest quality. The pasuk describes it as pure and made from crushed olives. Rashi explains the process for extruding the oil. First, olives were collected from the top of the tree. These are the choicest olives. The olives were crushed – just enough to release their oil – and not ground. The crushed olives were placed in a basket. Only the oil that initially drained from the basket was used for the Menorah. This oil was very pure and clear [1].

Why did Hashem command Moshe to secure this oil? Previously, Hashem commanded Moshe to secure the materials to create the Mishcan – the Tabernacle. Among the materials was oil for the Menorah [2]. Rashi explains that Moshe was commanded to secure the special oil. In other words, Moshe was already instructed to secure this special oil for the Menorah among the materials collected for the Mishcan. Why in our parasha is he again instructed to secure the special oil for the Menorah?

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno is among those who address this question.

“And they should take to you” When it is needed. This will be when the oil for the lamp that they have now contributed among the contributions for the Mishcan has been consumed. [This instruction is given] so that they should not think that the mitzvah of igniting the Menorah – with that [special] oil that they donated – is only temporary. (Sforno, Shemot 27:20) [3]

Rav Yehuda Cooperman Z”l in his notes on Sforno’s commentary explains that Moshe was previously commanded to secure for the Menorah the special oil described above. This oil was one of the supplies collected to create the Mishcan. When the Mishcan will be completed, this oil will be used to fuel the Menorah. When this initial supply of oil is consumed, new oil will be secured to maintain the flames of the Menorah. Moshe was commanded in our parasha to enforce the same standard for that oil. Like the oil initially collected, it must be extruded from the finest olives and meet the same standard of purity. In other words, the commandment in our parasha is needed to extend the standard of quality and purity indefinitely into the future.

II. Hashem reiterates the standard

Sforno’s interpretation of our pasuk is difficult to understand. It is based on a strange premise. It assumes that without renewal of the requirement for

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the best oil, any oil would have been acceptable. Consider an analogy. Your doctor gives you a prescription. He tells you that when the prescription is filled you should take the contents and mix them with distilled water and drink it. You precisely follow his directions. A few days later the doctor refills the order. Would you assume the new round of medication does not require distilled water? Of course not! Once he explained to you that the medication must be combined with water, you know that every round requires water.

Similarly, when the materials for the Mishcan were solicited, it was made clear that the Menorah requires the finest oil. Why was it necessary to reiterate this requirement for the oil used after the first oil was consumed?

III. Rambam's treatment of the issue

The answer to this question is provided by an analysis of Rambam's – Maimonides' – comments on the issue. Rambam explains that only the finest and purest oil may be used for the Menorah. In which section of his code – the Mishne Torah – do you expect this law to be placed? Obviously, it must be in the section that discusses the laws of the Menorah – Temidim uMusafim! Surprisingly, the requirement for special olive oil is not mentioned in that section. But this does not mean that he makes no mention of the requirement.

Where does he note this requirement? He places it in the final chapter of Issurai Mizbe'ach. This section primarily discusses prohibitions against sacrificing defective animals in the Bait HaMikdash – the Sacred Temple. How does Rambam fit into this section the requirement of the finest oil for the Menorah? Rambam addresses this issue in the opening of the chapter.

Not every entity that is not unacceptable may be brought [as a sacrifice] as an initial preference. What is implied? If one is obligated to bring a burnt offering, one should not bring a weak and unattractive sheep and [justify oneself saying]: "It does not have a blemish." Concerning this, can be applied [the words of] Malachi 1:14: "Cursed be the deceiver... [who sacrifices a blemished animal to G-d]." Instead, anyone who brings a sacrifice should bring from the highest quality. (Rambam, Mishne Torah, Issurai Mizbe'ach 7:1)

Rambam is explaining that defective animals may not be brought as sacrifices because their blemishes or other defects render them unfit as an offering to Hashem. However, this does not mean that all animals that are free of defect are equally fit to be offered to Hashem. We should offer only those animals that are choice.

With this introduction, Rambam proceeds to apply this principle to other offerings – to grain offerings and to libations. He explains that there are nine grades of oil. All are fit to be used in menachot – grain offerings [4]. If all are fit, why are they graded? Rambam explains that this is consistent with his opening comments. From among the oils that are fit, one should ideally choose the best oil.

In this context, he explains that only the highest grades of olive oil can be used for the Menorah. In other words, for menachot higher grades are preferable. For the Menorah, they are an absolute requirement [5].

What do we learn from Rambam's treatment of this requirement? Why does he place it in this section and not in the laws of the Menorah? He is explaining the reason that the finest oil is required for the Menorah. It is not because a lesser quality olive oil will not burn well; its flame will be adequate. We may not use these inferior oils because the Torah demanded that we use the best – the most refined oil. For the Menorah, it is not preferable to use the best; it is an absolute requirement.

IV. Making a sacrifice to serve Hashem

Before we can explain Sforno's interpretation of our pasuk, let us consider a final comment of Rambam. He closes this chapter of Issurai Mizbe'ach as follows:

In this way, one who desires to gain merit for himself, subjugate his evil inclination, and amplify his generosity should bring his sacrifice from the most desirable and superior type of the item he is bringing. For it is written in the Torah [Beresheit 4:4]: "And Hevel brought from his chosen flocks and from the superior ones and G-d turned [favored] to Hevel and his offering."

The same applies to everything given for the sake of the Almighty who is good. It should be of the most attractive and highest quality. If one builds a house of prayer, it should be more attractive than his own dwelling. If he feeds a hungry person, he should feed him from the best and most tasty foods of his table. If he clothes one who is naked, he should clothe him with his attractive garments. If he consecrates something, he should consecrate the best of his possession. And so [VaYikra 3:16] states: "All of the superior quality should be given to G-d." (Rambam, Mishne Torah, Issurai Mizbe'ach 7:1)

Rambam explains that in performing any commandment we can subjugate our yetzer ha'ra – our evil inclination. We are provided the opportunity to order our priorities. We do this by performing the commandment with the best of our possessions. We give that which is precious to us; we make a sacrifice. Rambam provides moving examples. We build synagogues that are more attractive than our homes. We clothe the poor in fine garments. We feed the needy with the best foods.

This is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, brass, blue, purple, scarlet, fine linen, goats' hair, rams' skins dyed red, sea cowhides, acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set for the ephod and for the breastplate. (Sefer Shemot 25:3-7)

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V. The donations to the Mishcan

Now, we are prepared to understand Sforno's comments. Moshe was required to secure the materials for the creation of the Mishcan. He asked that the contributors donate valuable possessions. Fine dyed wools and linen, gold, silver, brass, and precious stones. Also, they were asked to give the best olive oil. Through these donations, they fulfilled the objective identified by Rambam. Each donor subjugated his yetzer ha'ra by declaring his priorities. He gave from his most precious possessions for the creation of the Mishcan. He made a personal sacrifice. In this context, ordinary olive oil was unacceptable. Contributing ordinary oil is not a sacrifice and expresses the wrong priority!

Once the materials for the Mishcan were collected, it was not self-evident that inferior grades of olive oil would not be acceptable for the Menorah. The highest grades would be preferable, but would they be absolutely required?

Let's consider another analogy. I bought a new shirt. The shirt came with metal collar stays. The manufacturer uses metal and not plastic stays to communicate the quality of its shirts. Before I laundered the shirt, I removed the stays and promptly misplaced them. Must I replace the missing stays with metal ones? Of course not. The manufacturer had a reason for using high-quality stays. It was communicating a message. I care about function and plastic will work.

If Hashem did not command Moshe, in our parasha, to require only the highest quality and most pure olive oil, what would he have concluded? He would have concluded that Hashem required the contributions to the Mishcan be of only the best, most precious materials. Donors were required to make a sacrifice. He would have assumed that moving forward, any grade of olive oil is acceptable for the Menorah. The best oil is only preferable. Therefore, Hashem commanded Moshe to renew the requirement. Only the best oil may be used.

VI. Clarifying our values

A message emerges from this discussion. We are obligated to perform the Torah's mitzvot. Our intent is to execute our obligation – to fulfill the requirements of the mitzvah. We recognize that we can enhance our performance by beautifying the mitzvah. We can buy a more beautiful etrog or invest in a more carefully made set of tefillin. However, Rambam is teaching us that there is another aspect to our performance of a mitzvah. Every mitzvah we perform provides an opportunity to clarify our values. We can meet the requirements of the mitzvah, or we can make sacrifices to perform it in the best way. When I place a beautifully written mezuzah on my door, I am not only elevating the performance by using a better mezuzah. I am prioritizing. I am using my wealth for the performance of a mitzvah. I am molding my values. ■



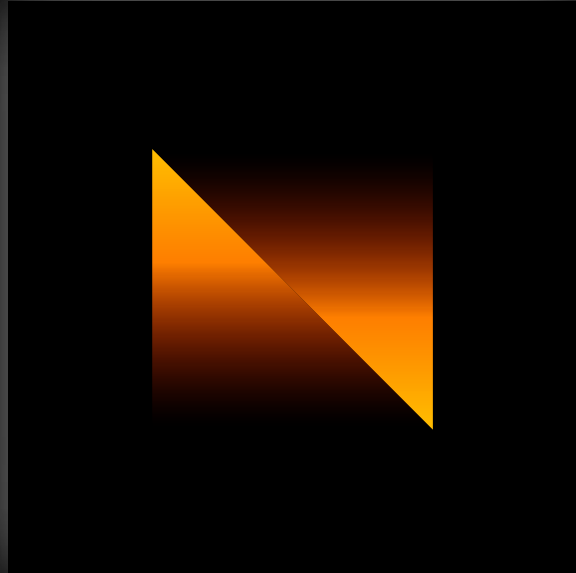
[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 27:20.

[2] Sefer Shemot 25:6.

[3] This translation is punctuated to best accommodate Rav Cooperman's interpretation.

[4] Menachot include olive oil.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Issuray Mizbe'ach 7:8-10.



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