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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

The Torah of Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Parashat Vayigash 5768

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Would you like to ask Rav Aviner a question? E-mail mororly@bezeqint.net and the question will be brought to Ha-Rav and I will e-mail you the answer.

I Feel Your Pain

"Then he [Yosef] fell on his brother Binyamin's neck and wept, and Binyamin wept upon his neck" (Bereshit 45:14). "And he [Yosef] wept" - over the two Temples that would stand in the territory of Binyamin and would be destroyed, and Binyamin wept over the Tabernacle of Shiloh that would stand in the territory of Yosef and would be destroyed (Rashi).

Why did they weep then, at a time of joy, over future destruction? And why did each one weep over the destruction in the other's territory and not in his own territory?

As is known, the Temples were destroyed on account of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). When Yosef and Binyamin met, they realized that the separation between them up to now was caused by baseless hatred, and they foresaw the future destruction, which would also be a result of baseless hatred. They therefore wept.

The spiritual repair of baseless hatred is the great strengthening of mutual love to the point where another person's pain is greater than one's own pain. Each one therefore wept over the other's destruction, which teaches and proves that each one of them cared more about the other's destruction than his own. Even though Binyamin's Temples could not be built until after the destruction of Yosef's Tabernacle, Binyamin nonetheless wept over the destruction of Yosef's Tabernacle, since he preferred that his Temples not be built if it meant that the other's sanctuary would be destroyed. This love contains in it the ability to be a spiritual cure for baseless hatred (based on Me'eina shel Torah in the name of Ha-Rav Ha-Kadosh Y. Mikazmir z"l).
-Tal Chermion



Text Message Responsa



Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Q: Does it make sense to ask a rabbi which profession to pursue if one cannot decide?

A: Absolutely. While it is not the "profession" of the rabbi [to be a job counselor], you can get good advice from him.

Q: Should I say "Shechechyanu" on a new kippah that was knit for me?

A: Yes, as with any new item over which you are happy.

Q: I am a "Ba'alat Teshuvah" (one who became observant) and have a tattoo on my shoulder. Should I remove it?

A: It is forbidden to get a tattoo, but if you have it, there is no obligation to remove it. It is obviously preferable to have it removed.

Q: Is it permissible to put on make-up before Shabbat which will remain all of Shabbat or is it "ma'arit ayin" (the appearance of doing something which is forbidden – putting on make-up on Shabbat)?

A: It is permissible, because we do not make new decrees regarding "ma'arit ayin," and especially here since many women act this way.

Q: A Divine Voice said that Elisha ben Abuya could not repent. Isn't this surprising?

A: Even he could have repented. It was a test.

Q: Is it permissible to put an older, sick dog to sleep? Please give source.

A: There is no prohibition to kill an animal. If it is done for no reason, like hunting for sport, it is cruel. Responsa of Noda Beyehudah (Yoreh De'ah #10).

Q: Does one violate "bal tashchit" (wantonly destroying things) by throwing a working television in the garbage?

A: No, on the contrary, [it is a mitzvah].



Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi

Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Honoring Parents

Our Rabbi would stand before his mother, and when he would separate from her he would walk backwards.

Our Rabbi's mother needed to send him a message to remind him that he needed to eat. When our Rabbi reached the age of bar mitzvah, he informed his mother that from now on he did not want her to determine what he ate, but he would decide on his own. Nevertheless, when there were days that she saw him and touched her finger on cookies that were on the table, he immediately took from them and ate in order to provide her with contentment.

Netilat Yadayim (Ritually washing hands)

- One day, before netilat yadayim, Our Rabbi said: "Blessed is Hashem, a meeting with King Shlomo," on account of a recognition and feeling that King Shlomo, who established netilat yadayim, was there (see Shabbat 14b and Rambam, Hilchot Avot Ha-Tumah 8:8).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Avraham's language at home

Q: What language did Avraham Avinu speak to Terach? Was it Hebrew?

A: It seems that he spoke Aramaic to Terach, since Lavan - who was from Avraham's hometown - spoke Aramaic, and the Torah even quotes it.

Rav Kook and English

Q: Did Rav Kook know English?

A: Rav Kook learned English in order to speak to the British who were in the Land of Israel. The way he learned was that he learned through the whole Tanach with an English translation and the entire Gemara with an English translation. The British High Commissioner once said to Rav Kook, "You speak English like a prophet."

A talk given after lunch at the yeshiva -

Secular Jews: Today's Hellenists?

Q: If Yehudah Maccabee killed all of the Hellenists, why don't we kill all of today's Hellenists, i.e. secularists?

A: Where is it written in the Rambam or the Shulchan Aruch that we have to kill Hellenists? Even when learning Gemara, we do not make rulings until the issues are clarified by the Rishonim (early authorities). It is a story in the Book of Maccabees. Who says it is right? It is not in the codes. Even if it is right, we do not act based on "Ma'aseh Rav" – seeing the actions of a great Torah personality. Rabbi Avraham ben Ha-Rambam says that we do not rule based on "Ma'aseh Rav", since we do not know the reasons he acted that way. We cannot act until we check the reasons. Yehudah Maccabee had a "Beit Din Gadol" (Sanhedrin) and it was a temporary measure. It is true that the Rashba said that he had a "Beit Din Gadol" in Spain, but we do not understand enough to rely on the model of Yehudah Maccabee. Furthermore, we have to define who is a Hellenist. The secularists are not Hellenists! They are "Tinokot She-nishbe'u" - Jews who did not receive a proper Jewish upbringing and education. They are confused. The Hellenists wanted to destroy the Nation and the Land, and to make a Greek state here. Secular Jews do not want this. They serve in the army, and die for the Nation and the Land. And you call them Hellenists?! There is no connection between the two. Many of our ancestors had children who went astray: Avraham, Yitzchak, Shmuel, Eli, King David. Rav Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, had a secular son, Chaim Herzog, the President of Israel. Rav Herzog was once asked, don't we learn that the apple does not fall far from the tree? What happened? He said: This is only with a usual wind, but an unusual wind can carry it far away. He was referring to the Tosafot to Baba Kamma 27b. In today's world an unusual wind prevails. The first Lubavitcher Rebbe – the Alter Rebbe - the author of the "Tanya," had a son who converted to Christianity. Chabad hides him, and when they admit that he converted, they say that he was insane. Scholars research all about this son. They don't want to learn the beautiful teachings of the Tanya, but look for dirt. The secular Jews are not Hellenists. The reason people make comments like this is because they are sad, distressed and angry, but it is nonsense to talk this way.



Rav Aviner's article from this week's parashah sheet "Be-Ahava U-Be-Emuna" of Machon Meir
(Translated by Rafael Blumberg)

It's a Mitzvah to Take Part in the Strike

[The teacher's strike in Israel which began around Rosh Hashanah is entering its fourth month]

Obviously, the ideal is to solve labor disputes not through strikes but through rapprochement, arbitration or a court decision. One should not rush to use the weapon of strikes. Yet if one side refuses to talk, or to turn to arbitration, or to honor a decision of arbitration, it is permissible to use the weapon of a strike in order to force that side to agree to talk or to arbitration or to agree to a decision arrived at through arbitration.

This principle applies today regarding the school teachers, who are arguing that they do not receive enough of a salary, and that to the contrary, the strike is in the pupils' best interests. After all, if the teachers cannot earn a respectable living, many will not turn to this profession. Moreover, some will leave teaching. Also, due to the burden on teachers, who have to work many hours to earn a good living, the students are not going to receive the full care that they require.

Therefore, even though during the strike the students lose out, in the long run, they will benefit. Amongst our communal leadership, some do calculate the minor loss in the present versus the great benefit for the future – and this whether the pupils forfeit secular study or Torah study, for regarding both types of students, the same calculation applies.

And certainly a teacher cannot argue that he will not take part in a strike since either way it is going to take place. If one teacher is obligated, then all are obligated. If others do as he does, the strike will collapse. Regarding such thinking, it says, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man." If you strike, you don't want other teachers not to strike. Or, in the philosophical language of Kant, morality must be "universalized". In other words, in any moral dilemma, you must determine how matters will be if everyone behaves like you, and you must see yourself as a universal legislator whose behavior will serve as a yardstick for everyone. Therefore, every teacher must participate in the strike, both those teachers teaching secular subjects and those teaching religious subjects.

Yet since the pupils need to study, since their roaming around free is harmful and even dangerous, and since the teacher is free due to the strike, he has a moral obligation to give of his time to his students so as to advance them. In other words, he should provide them with informal study which is unconnected to the regular study regimen and which can be held in an informal location.

We have to hope and pray that the strike will improve the state of our children's education. One might ask: How can a teacher knowingly participate in a strike that brings Torah learning to a halt? This is an important question. Surely the Rabbis said that we do not cancel children's Torah learning even to build the Temple. Yet educational considerations lead us to cancel Torah learning for many things, such as... youth activities and the struggle over Eretz Yisrael.

Yet in the case at hand, let it be said that canceling those Torah studies is what will allow them to survive. After all, the present situation of the teachers' poverty and the crowdedness of the classrooms is leading to the loss of much Torah learning. It constitutes the worst neglect of Torah that there could be. Therefore, our great halachic decisors have allowed Torah-teachers' strikes under certain circumstances where there is no choice, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, Rabbi Chaim David HaLevi, and – among those alive today – Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

Moreover, should someone argue, "I, as a teacher, have no complaints. I receive a fair wage and in the institution where I teach all is well," he is still part of the Jewish People, which includes not just the rich but the poor as well. Providing good public education is literally a matter of "pikuach nefesh" – not just physical life and death, but spiritual life and death – for the nation. Hence no one can say, "All is well with me". Rather, he must enlist in the struggle on behalf of good education for the entire nation. Morality and self-sacrifice demand no less. And in these days of the strike, we must be strong and courageous on behalf of our children's education.



Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for the parashah sheet

"Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

We are not compatible

Q: We were married many years ago, but our marriage is not going well. The reason is clear to us: We are very different. We are simply not compatible. Why should we be stubborn and struggle in vain? Isn't it preferable to divorce and each of us will find a suitable mate and peace will be on Israel?

A: The answer is simple: Spouses are always different, they are never compatible. People are very different from one another. This is in fact the challenge. In our world, everyone pulls in his own direction. The world therefore turns into a powder-keg. We believe and are confident that everything will be full of love and brotherhood in the end. How is this going to happen? We begin with the smallest unit – spouses. Not only in romantic love is it good for one to be with the other, but in true love one does good for the other. Math says $1+1=2$. The poets say: $1+1=1$. In our case, the later ones are correct. Therefore, differences are not the stumbling block, but refusal to accept the differences. If you follow your intellect, which grafts things together quite well and sees commonality, it will show you the truth that you are in fact quite similar.

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