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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

From the Teachings of Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Parashat Chaye Sarah 5769

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Would you like to ask Rav Aviner a question? E-mail mororly@bezeqint.net.

Did you Raise a Hand Against a Soldier?!

[from "Be-Ahavah u-Be-Emunah" – Parashat Vayera 5769 – translated by R. Blumberg]

At the beginning of the settlement enterprise, the settlers encountered opposition from the army, and they set up several tents, bringing themselves into conflict with the army. Our rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook called on all of them to return from the tents. Prominent rabbis and professors sat in the Rav's home, and expressed a unanimous opinion that they had to go back there. Then Rav Tzvi Yehuda's voice thundered: "Did anybody raise a hand against a soldier?" and everyone remained silent. They were frightened, and they did not respond. Rav Tzvi Yehuda repeated in a thunderous voice: "Did anybody raise a hand?" Once more, everyone remained silent. Still Rav Tzvi Yehuda did not relent, and he shouted, "Did you raise a hand against a soldier?" Then they admitted that they had, in fact, and Rav Tzvi Yehuda replied, "In that case, stay here. Don't go back there." Rav Tzvi Yehuda did not let them go back there. Only after he had spoken to them on this topic at length, and they had committed themselves not to hit a soldier, did he approve their returning, and he then spoke very positively about the settlement drive and about the need to arouse the healthy forces everywhere (I heard this story from Rabbi Ya'akov Levanon, and it may well be that I don't recall all the details well).

Obviously, the truth must be stated that one is not just forbidden to hit soldiers, but to strike any Jew, and Rav Tzvi Yehuda made that point before the State's establishment in his article, "I Am Seeking My Brethren" [Hebrew], where he lays out rules of behavior for public struggles: No hitting, no degradations, no hatred (Le-Netivot Yisrael 1:106). This is an accepted halachic principle: One does not perform a mitzvah by way of a sin. One does not perform a mitzvah that brings a sin along with it. If it is possible to do the mitzvah without a sin, then we remained obligated to do it. Yet if it is impossible, then such performance of the mitzvah is not what G-d commanded us to do. The Jerusalem Talmud brings a parable of a person who brings to the king as a gift an object that he himself had stolen from the king (Perek Lulav HaGazul).

Woe to the person whose defender becomes his prosecutor (see Mesillat Yesharim at the beginning of Chapter 11 about those who fulfill mitzvot with the help of theft). As stated, we have to avoid not just striking our fellow man, but also speaking or thinking evil of him. There's a well-known saying in Hebrew: "What begins with thought, continues with speech, and ends up with deeds." All the preceding applies regarding every Jew, let alone regarding soldiers. Don't forget that this soldier endangers his life for you, and you lift a hand against him?! 99% of his time he is defending our people and our Land. He is defending the great sanctification of G-d's name. Yet sometimes he is forced, against his will, to do things that are enormously hard for him, and his heart cries within him. And you dare lift a hand against him?! You've forgotten the main point. You've forgotten that the backbone of the entire enterprise of rebuilding the Land, of the return to Zion, of establishing the State, of Israel's wars and settlement drives – is the love of Israel, the unity of Israel. That is what we need the most – to be friends.



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: How much time must one wait after eating dairy food before eating meat?

A: The basic law is that you do not have to wait, you just have to wash your hands and mouth or eat something parve.

Q: Is it permissible to use a counterfeit coin which I was given? What should I do with it?

A: It is forbidden, it is theft. There is nothing you can do with it.

Q: Who is greater – one who falls and gets up or one who never falls?

A: There is a dispute among our Sages who is greater - a fully righteous person or a "baal teshuvah" (someone who repents), but each is greater from a certain perspective. But according to all opinions, it is forbidden to fall.

Q: I live in house #42, and people told me that this number is bad luck. Is this true?

A: It is not true – it is totally fine.

Q: I borrowed shoes and one of the laces broke because it was weak, do I have to pay?

A: If you used it in a normal manner without pulling it too hard, you are exempt from paying based on "[an animal] dying from [normal] work" (in which one does not have to pay).

Q: Must a soldier who enters a village in order to make arrests recite "Tefillat Ha-Derech"?

A: Yes, since he is traveling into danger even if it is a short distance.

Q: If I thought ill about another person, but did not tell anyone, is it considered Lashon Ha-Ra?

A: No, it is considered not giving the benefit of the doubt, since one is obligated to give others the benefit of doubt.

Q: If I am the only cohan, it is preferable to pray Shemoneh Esrei at length (and miss Birchat Cohanim) or recite the Birchat Cohanim?

A: Birchat Cohanim is a Torah mitzvah and it also brings blessing to everyone.

Q: Is it permissible to say Hashem's Name in a foreign language?

A: Yes, but not in vain as with Hebrew.

Q: If a person struggles with suicidal tendencies and I am the only one who can listen to him, and he calls on Shabbat, what should I do?

A: Pick up the receiver and talk to him since it is a situation of safeguarding a life.

Q: I wake up really late when I am on vacation from school and miss the times for davening Shacharit. What davening should I do?

A: The morning blessings, Shema without its accompanying blessings and Minchah when it is time.

Q: What does the Torah say about space aliens?

A: The prophets did not inform us that there are aliens. By the way, from a scientific perspective, there is no proof.

Q: Is it permissible to enter a bathroom with tzitzit?

A: There is no problem. We do remove a talit outside.

Q: Over the last few months I have begun to strengthen myself and believe but now I am starting to slip. What should I do to keep me on the right path?

A: You should learn books about faith, especially Mesillat Yesharim. You should also participate in classes on faith.

Q: How big should a kippah be?

A: There are two opinions: The strict one – the kippah must cover a majority of the head. The lenient one – the kippah can be seen from all sides.

Q: Can I copy a disk I own to bring on a trip?

A: It is permissible, since only you are the one using it.

Q: Do I have to say Tefillat Ha-Derech when I have a driving lesson?

A: No, since it is in the city.

Q: My father fell from a ladder and he did not get hurt, but he has some pains. Should he recite Birchat Ha-Gomel?

A: Birchat Ha-Gomel is recited when one is saved from a potentially deadly situation. This means if he fell in a manner that he could have died, G-d forbid, he should recite Birchat Ha-Gomel.

Q: We just had a baby boy and we do not know what to name him. We are looking for a name that brings light, happiness, health, a good livelihood. Can you suggest a name?

A: Principally, every name is good, except for an evil person's name or a girl's name for a boy. The essence is that he should have "mazel tov" and grow up with abundant goodness and contentment.

Q: Is it permissible to organize pictures in an album on Shabbat?

A: No. It is the prohibition of "borer – selection."

Q: Is it permissible to use dental floss on Shabbat?

A: Yes as long as it does not break every time.

Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi

Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

The Younger Years – Part 4

Ha-Rabbanit Chayah Leah, our Rabbi's wife

At the end of 5680, our Rabbi traveled to Europe as an emissary of his father, Maran Ha-Rav Kook, in order to participate in the Agudat Yisrael conference. His goal was to explain to the leading Rabbis and Chasidic Rebbes the outlook of the "Degel Yerushalayim" movement, which was established by Maran Ha-Rav. Its purpose was to instill a soul within the general Zionist movement and to enlist Torah observant Jews for the sake of the spiritual return to the holiness of the Land of Israel.

During one of his trips, our Rabbi met the daughter of Ha-Rav Yehudah Leib Hutner of Warsaw, Ha-Rav Yehoshua Hutner's sister, for the sake of getting married. When our Rabbi saw her, he immediately loved her. They learned the entire book "Orot" together, while it was still in booklet form, before their marriage. They married on 26 Shevat 5682 in Warsaw.

Ha-Rabbanit Chayah Leah had Torah and general intellect, and was involved with education and social work. Our Rabbi said that she had a precise sense of people, and many times after he spoke with his students, she would say: "You should not expend so much energy on student b., but it is worthwhile toward student a."

Our Rabbi related that on one extremely cold winter day, Ha-Rabbanit went out to bring firewood to the poor in the Old City in Jerusalem. He begged her not to go out of the house. She nonetheless went and returned with pneumonia from which she died in 5704. Rav Hutner, her brother-in-law, said that the doctor gave her a shot and he did not know that she had a heart problem and she died from it. Our Rabbi, however, would not say such a thing.

Our Rabbi's sister, Ha-Rabbanit Batya Miriam, encouraged him to remarry, as did his former mother-in-law, but he refused. Ha-Rabbanit Cohain, the wife of the Nazir, also suggested a match. He responded: "You are right, but I am unable to." Our Rabbi did not remarry, but we do not know the reason.

A picture of Ha-Rabbanit Chayah Leah, taken before their wedding, hung in our Rabbi's home and everyone could see it.

Even forty years after she ascended on high, our Rabbi would speak with emotion and crying as if she had died that day. (Ha-Rav Yechezkel Greenwald)

Our Rabbi did not say "Eishet Chayil" before Kiddush on Shabbat night. When a student asked him about this, he somberly responded: I do not have an "Eishet Chayil" (woman of valor – since Ha-Rabbanit Chayah Leah died).

Yeshivat Mercaz Ha-Rav

When Yeshivat Mercaz Ha-Rav was established in the year 5683, Maran Ha-Rav Kook appointed his son as the spiritual advisor – he was responsible for the spiritual instruction of the students. He also gave classes in Tanach and Emunah (faith), and Maran Ha-Rav was sometimes present and had great joy from them.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Beards and Peyot

Q: Why do some students of Rav Kook never trim their beards?

A: Each person chooses their own path. It is not unique to students of Rav Kook.

Q: What is the meaning behind it?

A: The Zohar says that one should not touch his beard (Naso 130).

Q: Should one be strict in this regard?

A: According to the Zohar. Rav Kook said that Torah scholars should not trim or round-off their beard. Rav Chaim of Volozhin was asked about this and he said: "Look in my Zohar." The students looked there and next to "One should not touch his beard" was his emendation "with a razor," i.e. one should not touch his beard in the forbidden manner – with a razor (Igrot Re'eiyah vol. 2, p. 101).

Q: Why are more and more religious Zionist youth growing peyot, even children of fathers who themselves do not grow them?

A: Each person chooses his own path.

Special thank you to Fred Casden for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parshah Sheet