

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Vayera 5773

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein NICE PEOPLE

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin in his introductory commentary to the book of Bereshith remarks that the outstanding quality of the heroes and heroines of that holy book, our fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and our mothers, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah was that they were straight, good, nice people.

In reading the sections of the Torah describing them one is struck by how the Torah concentrates on the strains of their personal behavior with others and how very little attention is paid, if any at all, to their theology, philosophy and piety. The rabbis of Midrash and Talmud emphasized this by stating that we see that our father Avraham interrupts a conversation with God, so to speak, in order to welcome and tend to the needs of his three guests whom he believes at that moment to be human itinerant wayfarers.

We learn that welcoming strangers and helping others takes precedence over the spiritual experience of communicating with the Almighty. The rabbis taught us that somehow our forefathers were able to observe the Torah even before it was given to their descendants through Moshe at Mount Sinai.

Since Rabbi Akiva taught that love and care for others is the great and primary rule of the Torah, we can literally understand and appreciate the statement that the great people of Bereshith observed the Torah even before it was given. Their behavior and sensitivity towards others, even towards foes and sinners, was exemplary. These great people taught us that how one treats others is the measure of a person and in a broader sense, of an entire society as well.

We can see how far this concept goes when considering how important public opinion mattered to our great ancestors. When the Lord commanded Avraham to circumcise himself, Avraham was troubled by that commandment for he feared, in the words of Midrash, "that guests would no longer frequent my home."

Avraham takes counsel with his three friends and fellow monotheists, Aneir, Eshkol and Mamrei to hear their reaction to this commandment. It is hard to imagine why someone who is commanded explicitly by God to do something should feel impelled to run it by his friends to gain their opinion as well.

But Avraham is always aware that his actions can either enhance or imperil his greater mission of bringing God into the human equation of behavior and society. Thus he is bold enough to remind God, so to speak, of public opinion – "How will it look if the Judge of all of the earth shall somehow appear not to have acted justly?!"

And the Lord agrees to Avraham's argument. Yaakov tells Shimon and Levi that their actions against Shechem and his city left a repulsive odor regarding Yaakov and his family with the other inhabitants of the land. Shimon and Levi defend their actions by stating that they are not prepared to allow their sister to be treated as a harlot. But on his deathbed Yaakov reprimands them again. He held himself and his family to a higher standard of public probity.

Our current educational systems, both secular and religious, do not emphasize niceness, good behavior, care for others in their teaching curriculums. Rather, they tolerate bullying, violence and selfishness as long as the required educational material is covered.

The great Chasidic master was told that one of his disciples had "gone through" the entire Talmud. The holy master responded "But how much of the Talmud has 'gone through' my disciple?" We live in a very aggressive society. Road rage and road death are all too common here. Being nice is viewed by many here as being a personality defect – a sign of weakness and subservience.

But the clear message of our ancestors is that we are always held accountable when we are not nice. Ramban boldly criticizes Sarah and Avraham for their treatment of Hagar and Yishmael. It would be

completely unnecessary for me to point out the consequences of that behavior to the Jewish people over the centuries until our very day.

Yaakov, in fooling his father Yitzchak, will be repaid by his own children fooling him with the blood soaked shirt of Yosef. There is no escaping the consequences of one's behavior. And we are always held to the standards of our ancestors – to be nice, decent, sensitive and caring people. Educating ourselves and our generations to realize and subscribe to that goal is the moral imperative of our time.

Shabat shalom

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein

VAYERA

Godliness is a matter of perception – the perception of the individual himself or herself, as well as the perception of the outside society. Avraham is recognized, even by his pagan peers, as being a person of Godliness in their midst. A Godly person is recognizable to others through behavior, speech, and interpersonal relationships. That is what Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant meant in his famous statement: "The other person's welfare in this world is the key to my welfare in the eternal world."

The rabbis of the Talmud always emphasized the importance of one's reputation amongst others in his society. "What do the other human beings say about him?" was always their test of resident Godliness in an individual. Avraham has an open hand and an open heart, a concern for others - even those who are his spiritual enemies and are wrongdoers.

Avraham, however, is not a pacifist nor is he weak and naïve in the face of evil. He goes to war to save Lot and outwits both Pharaoh and Avimelech in their nefarious behavior toward his wife, Sarah. He is the perfect example and role model for the necessary practicality and realism of life, coupled with the Godly compassion for other human beings and their physical and spiritual plights.

In Judaism, service of God is always inextricably bound to the service of human society. As has often been pointed out, this was the central point of Avraham's faith, something that apparently was found lacking in his otherwise righteous predecessor, Noach.

A Godly person has super-sensitive faculties. Avraham hears the heavenly message to leave his homeland and to journey and settle in the Land of Israel. The great Rabbi of Kotzk observed that God's directive was made to all publicly but only Avraham heard it and acted upon it.

His Godliness in the attitude he exhibited towards others, his self-sacrifice in defense of his Godly convictions, his opposition to paganism and its societal and moral ills, and his acts of kindness and devotion to the help others, all combined to give him the ability to hear what others were deaf to and to see what others were blind to.

He is able to "see" God appear before him and to conduct a conversation, so to speak, with his Creator. That is the reward for and the measure of true Godliness in a person. His Godly personality and home environment transforms the three Bedouin Arabs who enter his tent into angels. Godliness can be contagious just as evil is also contagious. ,

Godliness sees the Creator in every activity and occurrence in one's life and society. It therefore prevents pettiness, selfishness and self-aggrandizement from dominating our behavior, speech and attitudes. King David in Psalms proclaimed: "I have placed God before my eyes permanently!" By so doing he captured in a phrase the essence of Godliness and Jewish life. A society that does not strive for at least a modicum of Godliness in its private lives and public environment will be afflicted with ears that hear not and eyes that see not. Hopefully, not so the people of Israel, Avraham's children and heirs.

Shabat shalom.

Turning Over

“And He (G-d) overturned these cities and all the plain and all the dwellers of the cities and the vegetation of the earth.” (19:25)

When we look at the situation today it's easy to despair.

The strident metallic clang of materialism and selfishness seem to swamp out the message of the Torah and its People. The sensuous siren call of the media surrounds us all with a world whose reality is merely virtual.

Society at large seems deaf to morality, to modesty, to the values that are rooted in the Torah. The motto of the time is “Let it all hang out”. In a world where there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing brings shame, and thus anything is possible. And what is possible - happens.

Those who stand for the eternal values of our people are despised as fundamentalists and violent barbarians. Everything has been turned upside down.

There is a strange thread of history that runs from this week's Torah portion down through the ages and climaxes in the end of history: Lot was rescued from the overturning of Sodom. Why specifically was it necessary to overturn Sodom? Why couldn't Sodom have just been destroyed with fire and brimstone? Wouldn't that have been cataclysmic enough? What are we supposed to learn from the fact that Sodom was overturned? From the fact that it was “reversed”?

After the destruction of Sodom, Lot's daughters thought that they were the only human survivors of what must have looked like a global nuclear holocaust. They surmised that the only way to perpetuate the human species was to cohabit with their father. The Torah, however, ascribes no blame to their actions, as their motivation was pure.

From this incestuous union came a people called Moav — literally ‘from father’. From Moav comes the prototypical convert, Ruth. From Ruth comes King David, and from King David comes the Mashiach. So it turns out that the foundation of Mashiach is ultimately in Sodom.

There are two ways that society's spiritual landscape can be changed. One way is by improving the situation bit by bit until the world is perfected. The other is that things get so bad that they cannot get any worse. At that point everything reverses in an instant from the nadir to the zenith. This second way is the way Mashiach will come.

The prophets speak in many places about the coming of Mashiach in terms of childbirth.

Someone ignorant of the process of childbirth who sees for the first time a woman in labor would be convinced that she is about to die. And the closer the actual moment of the birth, the stronger that impression would become. And then, within a couple of minutes, seeming tragedy has turned into the greatest joy. A new life has entered the world.

Immediately prior to the coming of Mashiach there will be a tremendous confusion in the world. Everything will seem to have gone haywire. The natural order will be turned on its head: Age will bow to youth. Ugliness will be trumpeted as beauty, and what is beautiful will be disparaged as unattractive. Barbarism will be lauded as culture. And culture will be dismissed as worthless. The hunger of consumerism and the lust for material wealth will grow more and more, and it will find less and less to satisfy its voracity.

Eventually “materialism” will grow so rapacious that it will become its own angel of death. It will literally consume itself and regurgitate itself back out.

But from this decay the line of David will sprout, like vegetation that springs forth from no more than dirt and earth. For vegetation cannot flourish unless the seed rots. The second event is predicated on the first. It can be no other way.

It's interesting to note that Mashiach is referred to as the “tzemach tzedek”, literally the “righteous sprouting”. This is because his coming is identical to the growth of vegetation. First total decay and only then new life.

This is the way Mashiach will come. The worse things become, the more painful the birthpangs, the nearer is his coming. Until, like a mother who

had delivered, all the tears and pain will be forgotten in the great joy of a new life.

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Vayera

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"Trials and Tests"

I arrived quite early to the fourth session of the weekly class, in which we were using the book of Genesis as a source for studying leadership.

Three of the students were already there, and they all seemed to resent my arrival and intrusion into their schmoozing. I sat down behind the teacher's desk, signaling to them that they could continue their conversation without concern for my butting in.

Carol was teasingly reprimanding Alex for a question he had asked Othniel. "It is rude to ask a person about his accent," she objected. "It makes him uncomfortable, and is really none of your business anyway."

I immediately realized that Alex, ever confrontative, had inquired about Othniel's accent. From the first time that Othniel spoke up in class, I had noted his thick accent and found myself wondering about its origin. It was like none of the other accents that I heard around the Jewish community in the city in which I then lived.

And, of course, Carol, true to form, was playing the role of the "big sister," protecting Othniel. But Othniel needed no protection.

"Let's wait until the rest of the class gets here," he responded. "My accent will be a good starting point for the story I plan to tell. It's my personal story, but it has a lot to do with this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24), and is most relevant to our topic, of leadership."

It did not surprise me that Carol applauded Othniel's intention to dominate the evening's class discussion. I was, however, shocked when Alex also encouraged Othniel, saying, "I would very much like to learn about your story, and I urge you to share it with the entire class."

At this point, the rest of the class filed in. I convened the session, remarking upon the fact that Othniel had a story to tell which was related to the weekly portion and to the subject of leadership. Everyone in the class expressed a readiness to let Othniel take charge. Everyone, that is, but Zalman, who had an agenda of his own, as we will shortly see.

Othniel began, and the difficulties we had experienced with understanding his heavily accented English vanished as we became absorbed in his story.

"It was a few years after I first learned that I was Jewish, and I began to study Torah. The first thing I was struck with was that the Torah began with stories—long and fascinating narratives—and not with laws or statements of theology. So for me to tell my story seems quite appropriate."

The class was all ears, except of course for Zalman, who clearly feared losing the floor.

Othniel, oblivious to Zalman's concerns, continued: "Back then, two passages stood out for me. One was the commandment of circumcision, which we read at the end of last week's parsha. The other one was the story of the binding of Isaac, at the end of this week's parsha."

Aware that he had the class's attention, Othniel lowered his voice to a whisper: "My mother was a Jewish woman in the early years of the Holocaust in Poland. She was pregnant with me when she sought out the assistance of a Gentile doctor whom she knew and trusted. He promised to help her deliver the baby, me, when the time came. She was in hiding but managed to come to his home in time for him to deliver me. Then she surrendered me to him and asked that he see to it that I survived, because she knew that she had but days to live.

"He was in no position to raise me himself, so he gave me over to a young Polish couple. They raised me as a Gentile, indeed as a Catholic, and it was not until I finished high school that they told me that I was Jewish. I never knew and never will know the identity of my parents, but from the time I first discovered my origins, I began to study Torah. I first learned of the

rite of circumcision at that first stage of my religious odyssey. After about a year, I arranged for my own circumcision. Now you know why I am transfixed every time I come across the passage we read last week.

"I soon learned that Abraham was not only faced with the test, or trial, of sacrificing his son Isaac. He was put to nine other tests as well. Indeed, his entire life can be seen as one long series of trials and tests. I identified with him, because I too was tested, far more than ten times, along my journey from that small Polish village and the Catholicism upon which I had been nurtured to this city and its large and welcoming Jewish community.

"When I was selected for this class, I was told that I was chosen because I showed the potential to become a leader in this community. Imagine my profound emotional reaction to the trust placed in me. For me, this is more than just a class. It is a confirmation of my adolescent decision to plunge into a life of difficult experiences.

"During our first discussion in this class about leadership, I must confess to having felt inadequate. How could I entertain a pretense to leadership when my Jewish background was so different from that of the rest of you? But then, between last week and tonight's session, I realized that these very difficulties, these trials and tests, are precisely what qualify a person for leadership. Abraham was put to the test ten times in his life, and that made him that much more qualified for the role he was to play in Jewish history than others who suffered no such trials."

The class was silent and deeply contemplative. Zalman broke the silence. "I too came to class this evening with words to share. But my words are based upon my intellectual experience, my studies, and not upon the type of life experience that Othniel just shared. I found it best expressed in the remarks of Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed (Part III, Chapter 24), where he reflects upon what he considers the most difficult concept in the Torah, the concept of *nisayon*, of God's putting man to the test. This is what he says: 'A calm and tranquil life does not prepare one for heroism; toil and tribulation prepare the hero.'"

I have not yet introduced you, dear reader, to Sam, another member of the class, and one who eventually gained the title "Sam the Summarizer." It was at this point in the conversation that he offered his first summary: "There are two types of wisdom, and they sometimes lead to the same conclusions. There is Zalman's wisdom which comes from his scholarly efforts, and there is Othniel's wisdom, which derives from the lessons of a life fraught with difficulty."

It seemed that it was the time for the curtain to be drawn on this exquisite drama. But Sam soon demonstrated that his verbal skills were not limited to providing summaries. He turned to Othniel and asked: "Where did you get the name Othniel from? Surely that's not what you were called back in the Polish village of your childhood."

Othniel grinned. "At the rate we study in this class, we will never reach the early chapters of the book of Judges. In my early studies, I read those chapters and became intrigued by the man named Othniel ben Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, and one of the early leaders of the Jewish people. He conquered a city. I later learned that the Talmud insists that it was not a literal city that he conquered. Rather, he conquered "the city of ignorance." For, you see, during the period of grief and mourning following the death of Moses, 1,700 important teachings were forgotten. Othniel was able to recover those teachings through his skills of reason.

"It was my fate to reach the age of 17 ignorant of many more than 1,700 lessons. I have devoted my life to recovering those lost teachings. My model and my inspiration was the biblical Othniel.

"He was a leader almost totally unknown by most students of Jewish history. But in today's era, when so many Jews are ignorant of their heritage, it is incumbent upon all of us here to follow Othniel's path."

The clock on the wall indicated that we had gone long past the scheduled ending of our session. It would have been superfluous for me to add anything to the interaction I just described. All I could say was, "I wonder what lies ahead for us next week as we study the parsha of Chaye Sarah. I'll see you then."

Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Even Higher Than Angels

It is one of the most famous scenes in the Bible. Abraham is sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day when three strangers pass by. He urges them to rest and take some food. The text calls them men. They are in fact angels, coming to tell Sarah that she will have a child.

The chapter seems simple. It is, however, complex and ambiguous. It consists of three sections:

Verse 1: G-d appears to Abraham.

Verses 2-16: Abraham and the men/angels.

Verses 17-33: The dialogue between G-d and Abraham about the fate of Sodom.

How are these sections related to one another? Are they one scene, two or three? The most obvious answer is three. Each of the above sections is a separate event. First, G-d appears to Abraham, as Rashi explains, "to visit the sick" after Abraham's circumcision. Then the visitors arrive with the news about Sarah's child. Then takes place the great dialogue about justice.

Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed II: 42) suggests that there are two scenes (the visit of the angels, and the dialogue with G-d). The first verse does not describe an event at all. It is, rather, a chapter heading.

The third possibility is that we have a single continuous scene. G-d appears to Abraham, but before He can speak, Abraham sees the passers-by and asks G-d to wait while he serves them food. Only when they have departed – in verse 17 – does he turn to G-d, and the conversation begins.

How we interpret the chapter will affect the way we translate the word *Adonai* in the third verse. It could mean (1) G-d or (2) 'my lords' or 'sirs'. In the first case, Abraham would be addressing heaven. In the second, he would be speaking to the passers-by.

Several English translations take the second option. Here is one example:

The Lord appeared to Abraham . . . He looked up, and saw three men standing over against him. On seeing them, he hurried from his tent door to meet them. Bowing low, he said, "Sirs, if I have deserved your favour, do not go past your servant without a visit."

The same ambiguity appears in the next chapter (19: 2), when two of Abraham's visitors (in this chapter they are described as angels) visit Lot in Sodom:

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening while Lot was sitting by the city gates. When he saw them, he rose to meet them and bowing low he said, "I pray you, sirs, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night there and bathe your feet."

Normally, differences of interpretation of biblical narrative have no halakhic implications. They are matters of legitimate disagreement. This case is unusual, because if we translate *Adonai* as 'G-d', it is a holy name, and both the writing of the word by a scribe, and the way we treat a parchment or document containing it, have special stringencies in Jewish law. If we translate it as 'my lords' or 'sirs', then it has no special sanctity. The simplest reading of both texts – the one concerning Abraham, the other, Lot – would be to read the word in both cases as 'sirs'. Jewish law, however, ruled otherwise. In the second case – the scene with Lot – it is read as 'sirs', but in the first it is read as 'G-d'. This is an extraordinary fact, because it suggests that Abraham interrupted G-d as He was about to speak, and asked Him to wait while he attended to his guests. This is how tradition ruled that the passage should be read:

The Lord appeared to Abraham . . . He looked up and saw three men standing over against him. On seeing them, he hurried from his tent door to meet them, and bowed down. [Turning to G-d] he said: "My G-d, if I have found favour in your eyes, do not leave your servant [i.e. Please wait until I have given hospitality to these men]." [He then turned to the men and said:] "Let me send for some water so that you may bathe your feet and rest under this tree..."

This daring interpretation became the basis for a principle in Judaism: "Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine presence." Faced with a choice between listening to G-d, and offering hospitality to [what seemed to be] human beings, Abraham chose the latter. G-d acceded to his request, and waited while Abraham brought the visitors food and drink, before engaging him in dialogue about the fate of Sodom.

How can this be so? Is it not disrespectful at best, heretical at worst, to put the needs of human beings before attending on the presence of G-d?

What the passage is telling us, though, is something of immense profundity. The idolaters of Abraham's time worshipped the sun, the stars, and the forces of nature as gods. They worshipped power and the powerful. Abraham knew, however, that G-d is not in nature but beyond nature. There is only one thing in the universe on which He has set His image: the human person, every person, powerful and powerless alike.

The forces of nature are impersonal, which is why those who worship them eventually lose their humanity. As the Psalm puts it:

Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nostrils but cannot smell... Their makers become like them, and so do all who put their trust in them. (Psalm 115)

You cannot worship impersonal forces and remain a person: compassionate, humane, generous, forgiving. Precisely because we believe that G-d is personal, someone to whom we can say 'You', we honour human dignity as sacrosanct. Abraham, father of monotheism, knew the paradoxical truth that to live the life of faith is to see the trace of G-d in the face of the stranger. It is easy to receive the Divine presence when G-d appears as G-d. What is difficult is to sense the Divine presence when it comes disguised as three anonymous passers-by. That was Abraham's greatness. He knew that serving G-d and offering hospitality to strangers were not two things but one.

One of the most beautiful comments on this episode was given by R. Shalom of Belz who noted that in verse 2, the visitors are spoken of as standing above Abraham [nitzavim alav]. In verse 8, Abraham is described as standing above them [omed alehem]. He said: at first, the visitors were higher than Abraham because they were angels and he a mere human being. But when he gave them food and drink and shelter, he stood even higher than the angels. We honour G-d by honouring His image, humankind.

To read more writings and teachings from the Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, please visit www.chief Rabbi.org.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayera

Lesson #1 In Hospitality: Don't Let Your Guests Feel Inferior

In this week's parsha, three strangers came upon Avraham in the heat of the day while he was recuperating from his circumcision. He runs to greet them. He gives them food and water and insists that they come into his tent where he can show them full hospitality. This incident is the paradigm of the mitzvah of "hosting guests" (hachnasas Orchim). We have spoken about this in prior years.

The Ramban writes that when Avraham addressed the strangers he used the word "Adonai," which is spelled with a kametz vowel under the letter nun. This is the same spelling as we find for the name of G-d, which indicates that Avraham recognized them as being Angels from on High. It is for this reason, the Ramban writes, that Avraham bowed down to them.

If Avraham recognized virtually from the outset that these were not mere Arabs walking in the desert heat, but rather Heavenly Angels, a powerful question arises. What was Avraham doing preparing such a sumptuous meal for them? Chazal say that Avraham slaughtered separate animals for each guest, so that they could each taste a delicious tongue. Why does he have Sarah bake such large quantities of bread for guests, who he apparently knew did not consume earthly food? Angels are spiritual beings. They eat neither tongue nor bread nor any of the other items Avraham troubled himself to prepare! Why the charade?

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody – the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva – in his Sefer Sam Derech cites the principle that "precious is man who was created in G-d's Image". He writes that based on this principle, it does not matter if one is dealing with real human beings or imaginary human beings, the laws of Derech Eretz [proper moral etiquette] of treating human beings kindly and generously requires one to treat the angels and feed them as though they were literal human beings who would enjoy all kind of earthly delicacies. By virtue of the fact that they looked like human beings who were created in the Image of G-d, Avraham was required to treat them like human beings.

This is the lesson of this parsha. A human being, who is created in the image of G-d, is to be held in such high esteem that even someone who only has the appearance of a human being must also be treated the same way.

With this idea, we can come to appreciate an interesting observation made by Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. The Torah describes Avraham's hospitality: "He took cream and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these before them; he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate." [Bereshis 18:8]. The Berditchev comments: The first rule of how to treat guests is to make them feel comfortable and not make them feel as though they are inferior. Even though, in truth, the host may be much superior to them, he should never show that off. The guests should never be made to feel "This host of ours is in a different league than we are."

If you have a guest for Shabbos who is mainly preoccupied with trivialities in life, he is not a "Daf Yomi person" or anything near that, do not say to him, "Well, it is already 9 o'clock. I have to learn my Daf Yomi." It will make him feel inferior. If you are a "Tikun Chatzos Jew" (who recites special prayers at midnight mourning the destruction of the Temple) and your guest says at 9:30 pm "I am going up to bed now", do not tell him "Oh, I can't go to bed yet, I need to stay up another 2 and a half hours to recite Tikun Chatzos". If your guest asks you, "What time is minyan in the morning?" do not tell him "I never miss praying at sunrise," when you know your guest has never seen sunrise! This is rule #1 of hospitality – do not make your guest feel inferior.

Rav Levi Yitzchak explains that Avraham had a problem. He knew the guests were angels. One would think "There is no way to trump that! These guests of mine are angels!" That is not so. Just the opposite is true. Angels may be angels, but they have one major shortcoming. There is no spiritual growth with angels. They are created however they are and that is how they remain until they finish their mission. They do not grow. They do not improve. They are static creatures ("omdim").

Human beings are dynamic; they are constantly on the move. Man is a "holech". He may go up, he may go down, but he is not stationary. Avraham Avinu has invited guests, who are trapped in a state of "omed" while he is an unbelievable "holech", a spiritual dynamo who goes from test to test, passing each with flying colors. How will he be able to protect his guests from feeling inferior? Rav Levi Yitzchak gives a "Chassidic interpretation" to the pasuk "And he stood upon them under the tree while they ate." For that encounter, he made himself like one who was standing stationary, like an "omed," so as not to make his guests feel uncomfortable. This is rule #1 of hospitality and rule #1 of doing favors. When you do a chessed [favor] for someone, do not rub it in his face! Do not make it seem to him like you are doing him the biggest favor in the world. You must do it in a nonchalant fashion, so that he does not even realize you are doing him a favor. If someone asks you for a ride and you are actually headed in the other direction, you dare not tell him how much out of the way it is and impress him with what a big favor you are doing him. Rather, say, "That is unbelievable! I was headed just a block away from there myself!"

The Talmud teaches that one who says "This Sela is given to charity on the condition that my son lives" is a fully righteous person. [Bava Basra 10b]. He is giving Tzedakah for the most personal of motives, for the least altruistic of reasons. Rabbi Mordechai Bennet comments: I would understand if the Talmud said that such a person fulfills the mitzvah of Tzedakah. I would understand if the Talmud said that such a person did a nice thing. But how could the Talmud say that a person who gave charity

for such "selfish reasons" was a "Tzadik gamur" [a completely righteous person]?

He interprets the case as follows: A person comes to a Jew and tells him his tale of woe. Alas, he needs money and he has this trouble and that trouble. The Jew says to him, "You are a G-d send. I also have a great misfortune in my family. I also need merit. I am therefore giving you this money so that my son should live. You are doing me the favor! I needed a meshullach!" This takes away the beggars discomfort and his feeling of inferiority. It removes the sense he has that he is a "nebach" and that the person he solicits is a great benefactor. Just the opposite! It is as if the person told him: "I am the 'nebach' and YOU are helping ME!" Such a person is a Tzadik Gamur. That is what the Gemara means.

We learn this from the master of Chessed – Avraham Avinu, who took individuals who did not need any of this, but treated them with great respect and dignity, because that is how one must treat a human being. He went so far as even to disguise his own growth so that they, as static beings, would not feel embarrassed in front of him.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Vayeira: Abraham's Return from the Akeidah

The Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac, was over. Abraham passed this extraordinary test, and descended from the heights of Mount Moriah - both physically and spiritually. The Torah concludes the narrative with a description of Abraham's return to the world:

"Abraham returned to his young men; and they rose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived in Beersheba." (Gen. 22:19)

Why does the Torah mention that Abraham rejoined the young men he had left behind with the donkey? And why the emphasis on his return to Beersheba and settling there?

Rejoining the World

The powerful experience of the Akeidah could have caused Abraham to disengage from the world and remove himself from its petty and sordid ways. The extraordinary spiritual encounter on Mount Moriah might have led him to forgo the battle against ignorance and idolatry in the world.

However, this did not happen. Every word in this verse emphasizes the extent of Abraham's return to the society after the Akeidah.

"Abraham returned to his young men." Abraham did not relinquish his mission of influencing and educating others. This is the significance of mentioning his return to the young men he had left behind 'with the donkey.' Before ascending Mount Moriah, Abraham had instructed them to stay behind. They were not ready for this supreme spiritual ascent. They needed to stay with 'the donkey' - in Hebrew, the 'chamor' - for they were not ready to sever all ties with their 'chomer', their materialistic life.

But now Abraham returned to them. He descended to their level, in order to elevate and enlighten them.

"They rose and went together to Beersheba." They rose - with raised spirits, with a pure and holy light. And the most incredible aspect of Abraham's return was that, despite everything that had taken place at the heights of Mount Moriah, Abraham and the young men were able to proceed together - united in purpose and plan of action - to Beersheba.

Beersheba

What is the significance of this journey to Beersheba?

The name 'Beersheba' has two meanings. It means 'Well of Oath,' and also 'Well of Seven.' An oath is a pledge to take action. When we take an oath, we vow that our vision will not remain just a theoretical concept. We promise to translate our beliefs into action.

The number seven similarly signifies completion of the natural world. It took seven days to finish creating the universe. Beersheba is thus a metaphor for the practical application of Abraham's convictions and ideals. "Abraham lived in Beersheba." Abraham stayed in Beersheba, continuing his activities there. His name Abraham - meaning 'father of many nations' - was especially appropriate in Beersheba. There he set up his eshel, an inn that brought wayfarers to recognize God's kindness and to 'call in the name of God, the Eternal Lord' (Gen. 21:33).

Where was Isaac?

While the Torah describes Abraham's return, it is mysteriously silent about Isaac. What happened to Isaac after the Akeidah?

Concealed behind Abraham's public works was a hidden ray of light. This light was Isaac's unique trait of mesirut nefesh, the quality of total devotion and self-sacrifice that he had demonstrated at the Akeidah.

While Abraham's activities were directed towards all peoples, Isaac passed on this legacy of mesirut nefesh to his descendants, a spiritual gift to the Jewish people for all generations.

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 96-97)

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Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Making an Image of Celestial Bodies

Question: Is it permitted to photograph the sun, moon or stars?

Discussion: From the verse in Parashas Yisro,¹ "You must not make images of what is with Me," the Rabbis of the Talmud² derive a Biblical prohibition against making images of any celestial bodies. Rambam³ explains that the Torah prohibits making these images so that people will not come to attribute Divine powers to them and worship them as avodah zarah.⁴ Thus it is forbidden to make an image of the sun, moon or stars.

What does "make an image" mean? How do we define "image" concerning this prohibition? The Rishonim describe three types of images: Protruding (or raised) image — a three-dimensional replica.

Depressed image — an image carved into a substance.

Flat image — a two-dimensional painting or drawing on a flat surface.

Some Rishonim⁵ hold that the prohibition applies only to images which are raised or protruding; a depressed or flat image is not a true representation of a celestial body and may be fashioned.

Shulchan Aruch,⁶ however, rules like the majority of Rishonim who maintain that the prohibition includes a depressed or a flat image as well. In their opinion, a depressed or a flat image is a true representation of a celestial body, since from our perspective, the sun, moon and stars do not appear to the human eye as protruding from the heavens.⁷

A minority view makes a distinction between a depressed image — which is prohibited, and a flat image — which is permitted. They reason that a flat image of no depth is not considered an image at all and is permitted to be painted or drawn.⁸ But most authorities equate a flat image with a depressed image, which the Shulchan Aruch strictly prohibits.⁹ The basic halachah follows the more stringent view.¹⁰

Contemporary poskim debate whether taking a photograph of the sun or the moon is similar to drawing a flat image. Several rule stringently on this issue.¹¹

Note: Although a flat image is prohibited, this applies only to making an image where the intent is to represent a celestial body. For instance, it is prohibited to paint a shul ceiling with "stars,"¹² since the intent is to represent the stars in the sky. But it is permitted to make images of the sun, moon or stars when there is no such intention. Thus, it is permitted to draw a Magen David, bake cookies in the form of a half-moon, give children a "star" on a homework assignment, etc.¹³

Question: Is it permitted to draw (or photograph) part of the sun or moon?

Discussion: It is only prohibited to draw (or photograph) an image of the sun in its entirety.¹⁴ It is permitted to draw (or photograph) a part of the sun, or a partial view of the sun — i.e., a sun which is partially obscured by clouds or after it has begun to set and is no longer entirely visible.¹⁵ The same halachah applies to stars.

But it is forbidden to draw (or photograph) the moon in the beginning of the lunar month, even though only part of the moon is visible at that time.¹⁶

The reason why the halachah permits making a picture of part of a sun or part of a star and forbids making an image of part of a moon is as follows: Barring extraordinary weather conditions, the sun and stars always appear to us in their entirety; creating part of a sun or part of a star, therefore, is not considered making an image of the sun or star at all. The moon, on the other hand, appears to us in different shapes at different times of the month; in the beginning of the month, the partial-moon is the actual appearance of the moon from our visual perspective. Thus it is forbidden to recreate that image of the moon.¹⁷

Question: Is it permitted to create (or photograph) an image of the sun or the moon for instructional purposes?

Discussion: Shulchan Aruch 18 rules that it is permitted to create images of celestial bodies if it is for the purpose of “study, to [better] understand [their nature] and to [be able to] teach [their laws].” Indeed, the Talmud tells us that Rabban Gamliel himself used various moon shapes to assist him in questioning witnesses who testified regarding kiddush ha-chodesh. But contemporary poskim are divided concerning the practical applications of this leniency:¹⁹

* Some poskim permit creating these images only to aid in the study of practical halachah, as in the case of Rabban Gamliel.²⁰

* Other poskim permit creating these images as teaching tools for any area of Torah study, e.g., when studying the creation of the world in Parashas Bereishis or when learning about Yosef’s dream.²¹

One should consult an halachic authority as to whether or not it is permitted to make an image of a celestial body if it is going to be used in a classroom science project, etc.²²

Question: Is it permitted to commission a non-Jew to draw (or photograph) an image of a celestial body?

Discussion: No, it is not permitted. Just as it is forbidden to instruct a non-Jew to desecrate the Shabbos on behalf of a Jew, so, too, it is forbidden to instruct a non-Jew to transgress any Torah prohibition on behalf of a Jew.²³

But once a picture (or a photograph) of an image of the sun, moon or stars has already been drawn or painted, it is permitted to leave it in one’s domain; there is no obligation to destroy or get rid of it. [This applies to depressed or flat images only; a protruding image of a celestial body may not be kept in one’s possession.] Thus, if a picture of the sun, moon or stars appears in a book or a newspaper, one need not cut it out.²⁴

- 1 Shemos 20:20.
- 2 Rosh Hashanah 24b; Avodah Zarah 43b.
- 3 Avodah Zarah 3:10; Sefer ha-Mitzvos, Lo Sa’asseh 4.
- 4 Other Rishonim, however, understand that this prohibition is a gezeiras ha-kasuv; see Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Yisro), for an elaboration.
- 5 Ramban and Ritva, Avodah Zarah 43b.
- 6 Y.D. 151:4.
- 7 See Tosafos, Rosh Hashanah 24b, s.v. v’ha; Kesef Mishneh, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 3:11.
- 8 Darchei Moshe, Y.D. 141:5, quoting Maharam; Taz, Y.D. 141:13 and Pischei Teshuvah 6. See Beis Avi 2:75.
- 9 Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 3:11; Nekudos ha-Kesef, Y.D. 141:5; Chochmas Adam 85:5; Pischei Teshuvah, Y.D. 141:8; Darchei Teshuvah Y.D. 141:36, quoting Beis Shelomo; Rashash, Yuma 54b.
- 9 See Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:9-6, Minchas Yitzchak 10:72 and Shevet ha-Levi 7:134.

- 10 Minchas Yitzchak 10:72; Rav N. Karelitz (Avodas Melech, pg. 337). See, however, Shevet ha-Levi 7:134, who remains undecided on this issue.
- 11 Although in reality stars are spherical, nowadays the designated and universally recognized symbol for a star is the five-pointed “star.” Accordingly, one may not create that image, since it is that symbol which represents the celestial body of a star; Rav N. Karelitz, Avodas Melech, pg. 337.
- 12 See Nekudos ha-Kesef, Y.D. 141:5, who rules that only a tzurah gemurah is prohibited. Rav N. Karelitz (Avodas Melech, pg. 337) explains that any tzurah b’alma, such as a Magen David or a half-moon cookie, is permitted, since there is no intent to represent a celestial body.
- 13 Shach, Y.D. 141:25. Indeed, it is only prohibited to draw a picture of the sun together with its rays; there is no prohibition against making just a round circle that resembles the sun; Tzitz Eliezer 9:44-9, quoting several sources. [See Shevet ha-Kehasi 6:302-2, who rules that it is only prohibited to draw a red sun, the color in which it appears during sunrise and sunset.]
- 14 Shevet ha-Levi 7:134; Rav N. Karelitz (Avodas Melech, pg. 337).
- 15 Darchei Teshuvah, Y.D. 141:38 and 51.
- 16 Darchei Teshuvah, Y.D. 141:38; Shevet ha-Levi 7:134; Rav N. Karelitz (Avodas Melech, pg. 337).
- 17 Y.D. 141:4.
- 18 Note that Chochmas Adam and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch omit this leniency altogether, which leads Minchas Yitzchak 10:72 to suggest that nowadays, there are no practical applications of this leniency.
- 19 Rav N. Karelitz (Avodas Melech, pg. 337). This appears to be the view of Chasam Sofer, Y.D. 128.
- 20 Shevet ha-Levi 7:134, based on Nekudos ha-Kesef who permitted, in part, the publication of machzorim that contained a drawing of the twelve constellations because the mazalos can be better understood when viewing them.
- 21 See Meiri (Avodah Zarah 42b, s.v. din acheirim), who seems to permit creating images of celestial bodies for the purpose of learning astronomy.
- 22 Shach, Y.D. 141:23.
- 23 Entire paragraph based on Chochmas Adam 85:6-8 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 168:1 (see Az Nidberu 8:59). See also Darchei Teshuvah, Y.D. 141:34, quoting Lechem Rav.

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The Significance of Tachanun

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This week’s parsha discusses Avraham’s prayers on behalf of Sodom, thus providing me with enough of an excuse to discuss a different, intense prayer:

Why is Tachanun such an important part of davening?

According to the Zohar, the level of kapparah (atonement) achieved through the sincere recital of Tachanun cannot be accomplished at any other time in this world. Other sources teach that a tearfully recited Tachanun can accomplish more than any other prayer (see Bava Metzia 59b).

The Rambam writes that the most important aspect of Tachanun is to make personal requests. He states pointedly that there is no limit to the number of personal requests one may make. Many follow this highly recommended practice.

Although the importance of Tachanun is underestimated and not duly appreciated by many, this should certainly not be the case; Tachanun is actually based on Moshe Rabbeinu’s successful entreating of Hashem on Har Sinai to spare Klal Yisrael from punishment after their grievous sins: “Va’esnapel lifnai Hashem (Devarim 9:18, 25) - And I threw myself down in prayer before G-d,” (Tur, Orach Chayim 131).

When do we recite Tachanun?

After completing Shemoneh Esrei, which is recited standing, the mitzvah of Tefillah is continued by reciting the Tachanun in a manner reminiscent of prostration (see Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 5:1,13). Thus, Tachanun should be viewed and treated as a continuation of the Shemoneh Esrei (Levush).

Total submission

In earlier days, Tachanun was said with one's face pressed to the ground and one's body stretched out in total submission to Hashem (Megillah 22b; Rambam; Tur; see Bach). In the time of the Gemara, people bowed without prostrating themselves totally, or by prostrating themselves while tilting a bit on their side (Megillah 22b). This was done to avoid violating the prohibition against prostrating oneself on a stone surface, which is derived from the pasuk "You may not place a stone (even maskis) for bowing upon it in your Land" (Vayikra 26:1). This prohibition is violated only by prostrating oneself on a stone with one's hands and legs completely stretched out.

The accepted custom today is that we do not prostrate ourselves except on Yom Kippur (and some people on Rosh Hashanah) and, when doing so, we place cloth or paper beneath ourselves to avoid any shaylah (see Shu't Rivash #412 and commentaries on Tur 131). Similarly, we do not bow fully when reciting Tachanun. The Ashkenazic custom is to recite tachanun sitting while resting one's head on the arm as a reminiscence of bowing. This is called "falling Tachanun." The custom among Sefardim is to sit while reciting Tachanun but not to place the head down. I will soon explain the halachic reasons for both practices.

Interrupting between Shemoneh Esrei and Tachanun

Conversing between Shemoneh Esrei and Tachanun weakens the effectiveness of the Tachanun (Bava Metzia 59b as explained by the Shibbolei HaLeket #30 and the Beis Yosef; Levush). Therefore, the Shulchan Aruch rules that one should not converse between Tefillah and Tachanun. Some contend that only a lengthy conversation disturbs the efficacy of the Tachanun, but not a short interruption (Magen Avraham), whereas others rule that any interruption undermines the value of the Tachanun (Aruch HaShulchan; Kaf HaChayim, quoting Zohar and Ari).

The Magen Avraham also rules that one may recite Tachanun in a different place from where one davened Shemoneh Esrei and it is not considered an interruption.

Interrupting during Tachanun

One should not interrupt during the recital of Tachanun except to answer Borchu and the significant responses of Kedusha and Kaddish (Shaarei Teshuvah 131:1).

May Tachanun be said standing?

The early authorities dispute whether Tachanun may be said standing, some contending that it is even preferable to recite Tachanun by bowing in a standing position. Others contend that it is better to sit for Tachanun; this completely avoids the problem of even maskis, since it is impossible to prostrate oneself completely from a sitting position (Shu't Rivash #412). The accepted custom is to recite Tachanun while sitting (Beis Yosef 131, quoting the mekubalim). The Shulchan Aruch (131:2) rules that one should recite Tachanun only in a sitting position. Under extenuating circumstances, one may recite it while standing (Mishnah Berurah).

What about the chazzan?

Tachanun is the only part of davening where the chazzan does not stand. Since the entire purpose of the Tachanun is to recite a prayer while one is bowing, the chazzan also "falls Tachanun."

What prayer is recited for Tachanun?

Whereas Ashkenazim recite Chapter 6 of Tehillim while "falling Tachanun," Sefardim recite Chapter 25 of Tehillim as Tachanun and recite it in a regular sitting position.

Why do Ashkenazim (including "nusach Sefard") "fall Tachanun" whereas Sefardim (Edot HaMizrach) do not? And why do Ashkenazim and Sefardim recite different chapters of Tehillim for Tachanun?

In actuality, these differing practices are based on the same source. According to the Zohar, the sincere, dedicated recital of Chapter 25 of Tehillim accomplishes a tremendous level of atonement and repairs other spiritual shortcomings. However, reciting it insincerely and without proper intent can cause tremendous damage (Zohar, end of Parshas Bamidbar, quoted by Beis Yosef). To avoid the harm that may be incurred should Tachanun not be said properly, both Ashkenazim and Sefardim say Tachanun differently from the procedure described by the Zohar. Ashkenazim recite Chapter 6 of Tehillim rather than Chapter 25 (Magen Avraham 131:5), while Sefardim recite Chapter 25 as stated in Zohar, but do not place their heads down in a bowing position. The Sefardic practice is never to do nefillas apayim when reciting Tachanun, due to many not having the proper kavanos (Ben Ish Chai, 1: Ki Sissa; Yalkut Yosef, Orach Chayim 131: 16).

On which side do we lean?

The early authorities dispute whether it is preferable to lean on the left side or on the right side during Tachanun. Some contend that it is better to lean on the left side because wealthy people used to lean on that side in earlier times. (Compare the mitzvah of heseibah, reclining, at the Pesach Seder.) By leaning on the left side, we demonstrate the subjugation of our "wealthier" side to Hashem (Shibbolei HaLeket #30, quoting Rav Hai Gaon).

A second reason cited is that the Shechinah is opposite one's right side. Therefore when leaning on the left side, one faces the Shechinah which is opposite his right side (Shibbolei HaLeket, quoting his brother, R' Binyamin).

Others contend that one should always lean on the right side because this is the side where the Shechinah resides and we should fall Tachanun on the side of the Shechinah rather than the side facing it (Rakanati, quoted by Magen Avraham; Rama quoting yesh omrim).

The most common, but not exclusive, Ashkenazic practice is to lean on the left side when not wearing tefillin, and on the right side when wearing tefillin so as not to lean on the tefillin (Darchei Moshe and Rama comments on Shulchan Aruch). A left-handed person should always recite Tachanun while leaning on his left side (see Pri Megadim 131:Mishbetzos Zahav #2).

Why do we stand up in the middle of the pasuk "Va'anachnu lo neida"?

The first three words of this pasuk are recited sitting and then we stand up to complete the prayer. In addition, we say the first five words of this prayer aloud. Why do we follow these unusual practices?

This practice is observed in order to emphasize that we have attempted to pray in several different positions. We davened Shemoneh Esrei while standing, Tachanun while bowing, and other prayers while sitting. Finally we exclaim, Va'anachnu lo neida, "We do not know!" We have tried every method of Tefillah that we can think of and we are unaware of any other possibilities (Shelah, quoted by Magen Avraham 131:4).

Tachanun recited with the community

Tachanun should preferably be said together with a minyan (Rambam; Tur). Therefore, someone in an Ashkenazi shul who finished Vehu Rachum before the tzibur should wait in order to begin Tachanun together with them (Be'er Heiteiv 134:1). Similarly, if davening with a mincha minyan that did not recite the full repetition of Shemoneh Esrei (heicha kedusha), one should wait to say Tachanun together with a minyan. (Please note that I am not advocating that a minyan daven with a heicha kedusha. I am personally opposed to this practice except for very extenuating circumstances.)

Is it more important to say Tachanun sitting or to recite it together with the minyan?

This question manifests itself in two cases. (1) Someone is davening Shemoneh Esrei immediately behind me, making it halachically impossible for me to sit down for Tachanun since it is forbidden to sit down in front of someone who is davening Shemoneh Esrei. (2) Someone who completed the Shemoneh Esrei is required to wait for a few seconds (the time it takes to walk four amos) in his place after backing up. Therefore, someone who just finished the quiet Shemoneh Esrei when the tzibur is beginning to say Tachanun needs to wait a few seconds before he can “fall Tachanun.” What is the optimal means of reconciling this with the obligation to recite Tachanun with the tzibur?

The poskim dispute concerning what is the best way to deal with this predicament. Some contend that one should begin Tachanun immediately while still standing (Mishnah Berurah 131:10), whereas others contend that it is better to wait and recite Tachanun while sitting (Magen Avraham 131:5).

Incidentally, the chazzan may immediately sit down and begin Tachanun without waiting for the regulation few seconds and walking back three steps. Instead, he should just leave the amud and sit down immediately for Tachanun (Mishnah Berurah 104:9).

Conclusion

It is essential to appreciate that Tachanun is a time when one can include personal tefillos and sincerely beg Hashem for whatever we lack. May He speedily answer all our prayers for good!

Praying for a Rainy Day When Traveling to or from Eretz Yisroel in November By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Although I sent this article out both last year and two years ago, many people appreciate reviewing these issues. I am also planning to send out another article later in the week that is related to the parsha. All my best

Whereas in chutz la'aretz we do not recite ve'sein tal umatar (the prayer for rain added to the bracha of Boreich Aleinu in the weekday shmoneh esrei) until the evening of December Fourth (this year -- the exact date varies), people in Eretz Yisroel begin reciting this prayer on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. This difference in practice leads to many interesting shaylos. Here are some examples:

Question #1:

Yankel, who lives in New York, is in aveilos l'a for his father and tries to lead services (colloquially, usually called “davening before the amud”) at every opportunity. He will be visiting Eretz Yisroel during the month of November. Does he recite the prayer according to the Eretz Yisroel practice while there? Which version does he recite in his quiet shmoneh esrei? Perhaps he should not even lead services while he is there!

Question #2:

Does someone attending Yeshiva or seminary in Eretz Yisroel, who observes two days of Yom Tov, recite ve'sein tal umatar according to the custom of Eretz Yisroel or according to the chutz la'aretz practice?

Question #3:

Reuven lives in Eretz Yisroel but is in chutz la'aretz on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Does he begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar while in chutz la'aretz, does he wait until he returns to Eretz Yisroel to begin reciting it, or does he follow the practice of those who live in chutz la'aretz and not recite it until December?

In order to explain the halachic issues involved in answering these shaylos, we must first explain why we begin requesting rain on dates in Eretz Yisroel different from those in chutz la'aretz.

The Gemara (Taanis 10a) concludes that in Eretz Yisroel one begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, whereas in Bavel (where there was a large concentration of Jews) one begins reciting it on the sixtieth day after the autumnal equinox. (The Gemara's method for calculating the autumnal equinox is based on what is called a sidereal year and differs from our familiar calculation, which is based on the solar year. The reason for this is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.) Someone who recites ve'sein tal umatar during the summer months in Eretz Yisroel must repeat the Shemoneh Esrei, since this request in the summer is inappropriate (Taanis 3b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 117:3).

WHY ARE THERE TWO DIFFERENT “RAIN DATES?”

Since Eretz Yisroel requires rain earlier than Bavel, Chazal instituted the custom of beginning the request for rain there shortly after Sukkos. In Bavel, where it was better if it began raining later, reciting ve'sein tal umatar was delayed until later. This practice is followed in all of chutz la'aretz, even in places where rain is not seasonal or where it is necessary that there be rain earlier -- although the precise reason why all of chutz la'aretz follows the practice of Bavel is uncertain (see Rashi and Rosh to Taanis 10a; Shu't Rosh 4:10; Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 117).

LOCAL CONDITIONS

If a city's residents need rain at a different time of the year, can they, or should they, recite ve'sein tal umatar then, or not? The Gemara (Taanis 14b) raises this question and cites the following story:

“The people of the city of Nineveh (in contemporary Iraq) sent the following shaylah to Rebbe: In our city we need rain, even in the middle of the summer. Should we be treated like individuals and request rain in the bracha of Shma Koleinu or like a community and recite ve'sein tal umatar during the bracha of Boreich Aleinu? Rebbe responded that they are considered individuals and should request rain during the bracha of Shma Koleinu.”

This means that an individual or a city that needs rain during a different part of the year should recite ve'sein tal umatar during the bracha of Shma Koleinu, but not as part of Boreich Aleinu.

NATIONAL CONDITIONS

Is a country different from a city? In other words, if an entire country or a large region requires rain at a different time of the year, should its residents recite ve'sein tal umatar during the bracha of Boreich Aleinu? The Rosh raises this question and contends, at least in theory, that a country should recite ve'sein tal umatar in Boreich Aleinu. In his opinion, most of North America and Europe should recite ve'sein tal umatar during the summer months. Although we do not follow this approach, someone who recites ve'sein tal umatar at a time when his country requires rain should not repeat the Shmoneh Esrei, but should rely retroactively on the opinion of the Rosh (Shulchan Aruch and Rama 117:2). Similarly, someone who recited ve'sein tal umatar as part of Boreich Aleinu in error after the Seventh of MarCheshvan should not repeat Shmoneh Esrei afterwards, unless he lives in a country where rain is not necessary at this time (Birkei Yosef 117:3; cf. Shu't Ohalei Yaakov #87 of Maharikash who disagrees.). With this introduction, we can now begin to discuss the questions at hand. What should someone do if he lives in Eretz Yisroel but is in chutz la'aretz, or vice versa, during the weeks when there is a difference in practice between the two places? As one can imagine, much halachic literature discusses this shaylah. I found three early opinions, which I quote in chronological order:

Opinion #1. The earliest opinion I found, that of the Maharikash (Shu't Ohalei Yaakov #87) and the Radbaz (Shu't #2055), discusses specifically an Eretz Yisroel resident who left his wife and children behind while traveling to chutz la'aretz. (In earlier generations, it was common that emissaries from the Eretz Yisroel communities traveled to chutz la'aretz for very extended periods of time to solicit funds.) These poskim ruled that

if the traveler left his family in Eretz Yisroel, he should begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, following the practice of Eretz Yisroel, regardless of whether he himself was then in Eretz Yisroel or in chutz la'aretz. If he is single, or alternatively, if he is traveling with his family, then when he begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar depends on whether he will be gone for the entire rainy season. If he leaves Eretz Yisroel before the Seventh of MarCheshvan and intends to be gone until Pesach or later, then he recites ve'sein tal umatar according to the practice of chutz la'aretz. If he intends to return before Pesach, then he recites ve'sein tal umatar beginning on the Seventh of MarCheshvan even though he is in chutz la'aretz.

The key question here is, what is the criterion for determining when someone recites ve'sein tal umatar? These poskim contend that it depends on his personal need. If his immediate family is in Eretz Yisroel and therefore requires rain already on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, he begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar then, even though he himself is in chutz la'aretz. This is considered that he has a personal need for rain (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:102).

Opinion #2. The Pri Chodosh (Orach Chayim 117) quotes the previous opinion (of the Maharikash and the Radbaz) and disputes with them, contending that only one factor determines when the traveler begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar – how long he plans to stay abroad. If he left Eretz Yisroel intending to be away for at least a year, he should consider himself a resident of chutz la'aretz (for this purpose) and begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar in December. If he intends to stay less than a year, he should begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Furthermore, the Pri Chodosh states that whether one leaves one's immediate family behind or not does not affect this halacha.

These two approaches disagree what determines when an individual recites ve'sein tal umatar. According to Opinion #1 (the Maharikash and the Radbaz), the main criterion is whether one has a personal need for rain as early as the Seventh of MarCheshvan. According to the

Opinion #2 (the Pri Chodosh), the issue is whether one is considered a resident of Eretz Yisroel or of chutz la'aretz.

According to this analysis of Opinion #2, a resident of chutz la'aretz who intends to spend a year in Eretz Yisroel begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, whereas, if he intends to stay less than a year, he follows the practice of chutz la'aretz (Pri Megadim; Mishnah Berurah; cf. however Halichos Shelomoh 8:28 pg. 107). However, according to Opinion #1, he would be reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan if he or his family intend to spend any time during the rainy season in Eretz Yisroel. Thus, we already know some background to Question #2 above concerning a yeshiva bachur or seminary student in Eretz Yisroel. According to Opinion #1, they should follow the Eretz Yisroel practice, whereas according to Opinion #2, they should follow the chutz la'aretz practice if they intend to stay for less than a year.

Opinion #3. The Birkei Yosef quotes the two above-mentioned opinions and also other early poskim who follow a third approach, that the determining factor is where you are on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. (See also Shu't Dvar Shmuel #323.) This approach implies that someone who is in Eretz Yisroel on the Seventh of MarCheshvan should begin praying for rain, even though he intends to return to chutz la'aretz shortly, and that someone who is in chutz la'aretz on that date should not, even though he left his family in Eretz Yisroel.

Dvar Shmuel and Birkei Yosef explain that someone needs rain where he is, and it is not dependent on his residence. Birkei Yosef points out that if there is a severe drought where he is located, it does not make any difference if he lives elsewhere; he will be a casualty of the lack of water. This was certainly true in earlier generations, where water supply was dependent on local wells. Even today, when water is supplied via piping from large reservoirs, this opinion would still rule that the halacha is determined by where one is presently located, and not one's permanent residence.

Opinion #3 (the Birkei Yosef's approach) is fairly similar to that of Opinion #1 (the Maharikash and the Radbaz), in that both approaches see the determining factor to be immediate need and not permanent residency. However, these two opinions dispute concerning several details, including what should be the practice of someone in chutz la'aretz whose family remains in Eretz Yisroel. According to Opinion #1, this person begins ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, whereas Opinion #3 contends that he begins only when the other bnei chutz la'aretz do.

Why does Opinion #3 disregard his family's being in Eretz Yisroel as a factor, whereas Opinion #1 is concerned? Birkei Yosef explains that praying for rain for one's family when one is in chutz la'aretz is praying for an individual need, since the rest of the community there has no need for rain, and an individual's private prayer should not be recited in the Boreich Aleinu section of shmoneh esrei. Presumably, Opinion #1 holds that praying for it to rain in Eretz Yisroel is not considered praying for an individual, even though I may be praying because of a personal reason.

After analyzing these three conflicting opinions, how do we rule? Although the later poskim, such as the Mishnah Berurah, refer to these earlier sources, it is unclear what they conclude halachically. (See Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 6:38, which offers a careful analysis of the words of the Mishnah Berurah on this subject.)

TRAVELING AND RETURNING

What does one do if he travels and returns within these days? Assuming that he began to recite ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan because he was in Eretz Yisroel (and he followed those opinions that rule this way, or he changed his plans), does he now stop reciting it upon his return to chutz la'aretz?

This question is raised by the Birkei Yosef (117:6), who rules that he continues reciting ve'sein tal umatar when he returns to chutz la'aretz.

What does one do if he is reciting ve'sein tal umatar and the community is not, or vice versa -- and he would like to lead the services ("daven before the amud")? Birkei Yosef rules that he should not lead the communal services; however, if he forgot and did so, he should follow his own version in the quiet Shmoneh Esrei and the community's version in the repetition (Birkei Yosef 117:8). Similarly, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that he should not lead the services (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:23, 29; 4:33). However, Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach permitted him to lead the services (Halichos Shelomoh 5:21).

Let us now examine some of the shaylos we raised above:

Question #1:

Yankel, who lives in New York, is in aveilos l'a for his father and tries to lead services at every opportunity. He will be visiting Eretz Yisroel during the month of November. Does he recite the prayer according to the Eretz Yisroel practice while there? Which version does he recite in his quiet shmoneh esrei? Perhaps he should not even lead services while he is there? According to all of the opinions involved, when davening privately Yankel should not recite ve'sein tal umatar until it is recited in chutz la'aretz, since he does not live in Eretz Yisroel, his family does not live there, and he was not there on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. As explained above, according to most opinions, he should not lead the services, since he is not reciting ve'sein tal umatar and the congregation is, whereas according to Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, he may lead the services. According to the Birkei Yosef, if he is in Eretz Yisroel on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, he should begin to recite ve'sein tal umatar then, since he now has a need for rain; he should continue to recite this prayer even when he returns to chutz la'aretz. However, in this case, when returning to chutz la'aretz, he should not lead services, according to most opinions, since he is reciting ve'sein tal umatar and they are not. If he forgot and led the services, he should recite ve'sein tal umatar in the quiet Shmoneh Esrei but not in the repetition.

According to the Pri Chodosh (Opinion #2 above), if he is in Eretz Yisroel on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, he should not recite ve'sein tal umatar, since he lives in chutz la'aretz. Following this approach, he should not lead

services when in Eretz Yisroel, but he may resume when he returns to chutz la'aretz.

Question #2:

Does someone attending Yeshiva or seminary in Eretz Yisroel, who observes two days of Yom Tov, recite ve'sein tal umatar according to the custom of Eretz Yisroel or according to the chutz la'aretz practice?

The answer to this question will depend on which of the above-quoted authorities one follows. According to Opinion #1 (the Maharikash, the Radbaz) and Opinion #3 (the Birkei Yosef), he should follow the practice of Eretz Yisroel since he needs the rain while here, even though he is not (yet) a permanent resident of Israel. According to Opinion #2 (the Pri Chodosh), if he is staying for less than a year, he follows the practice of chutz la'aretz, whereas if he is staying longer, he should begin reciting it from the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Several people have told me that Rav Elyashiv zt"l ruled that he should recite ve'sein tal umatar while he is in Eretz Yisroel, unless he intends to return before the end of the rainy season.

Question #3:

Reuven lives in Eretz Yisroel, but is in chutz la'aretz on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Does he begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar while in chutz la'aretz, does he wait until he returns to Eretz Yisroel, or does he follow the practice of those who live in chutz la'aretz?

According to Opinions # 1 and #2, he should follow the practice of those living in Eretz Yisroel, but for different reasons. According to Opinion #1, the reason is because he knows that he will return to Eretz Yisroel during the rainy season and therefore follows this approach. According to Opinion #2, since he left Eretz Yisroel for less than a year, he is considered an Eretz Yisroel resident.

Although it would seem that the Birkei Yosef would hold that he should not recite ve'sein tal umatar until the bnei chutz la'aretz do, it is not absolutely clear that he would disagree with the other poskim in this case. One could explain that he ruled that one follows the bnei chutz la'aretz only if he is there for an extended trip, but not if he is there for only a few weeks that happen to coincide with the Seventh of MarCheshvan. For this reason, when someone asked me this shaylah, I ruled that he should follow the practice of those dwelling in Eretz Yisroel. Subsequently, I found this exact shaylah in Shu't Tzitz Eliezer (6:38) and was very happy to find that he ruled the same way I had. (However, Halichos Shelomoh 8:19 rules that he should recite ve'sein tal umatar in Shma Koleinu and not in Boreich Aleinu.)

CONCLUSION

Rashi (Breishis 2:5) points out that until Adam HaRishon appeared, there was no rain in the world. Rain fell and grasses sprouted only after Adam was created, understood that rain was necessary for the world, and prayed to Hashem for rain. When we pray for rain, we must always remember that the essence of prayer is drawing ourselves closer to Hashem.

Please address all comments and requests to Hamelaket@gmail.com