

A Taste of Torah

Tough Love

By Rabbi Stern

Several years ago I visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Before entering the building I had prepared myself for the inevitable shock and horror I was to experience. Nonetheless, I was caught entirely off guard by the stark message emblazoned so matter-of-factly upon the wall. The words of Elie Wiesel, describing his first night in Auschwitz: "Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever... never shall I forget those moments which murdered my G-d and my soul and turned my dreams to dust." The message seemed to be that if we cannot corroborate our perception of G-d with our reality, He must not exist.

I am, perhaps, oversimplifying the complex intent of Mr. Wiesel, yet these words poignantly captured the outlook of many a Holocaust survivor. While I am certainly incapable of forming an opinion regarding such a sensitive matter, I cannot help but notice the contrast with the *weltanschauung* my own grandmother lives and espouses.

My Bubby, may she live and be well, is a Holocaust survivor who lost almost her entire family and knew unfathomable hardships during the war, yet she lives with a simple, unwavering faith in G-d. Often, I watch her pray and recite Psalms with the soft-spoken but fervent tone of someone conversing with her best and most trusted of friends. The unspoken message I have internalized from this great woman is that although we cannot always understand G-d's ways, He loves us more than we can imagine, and the difficulties we encounter are certainly for our benefit.

How can two people who survived the very same nightmare come to such terribly different conclusions!? Perhaps we can shed some light on this painful topic with a passage from the Talmud (Chagiga 5b). The Gemara relates that a heretic once challenged R' Yehoshua ben Chananya,

asserting that the Jewish nation had been betrayed by G-d, ostensibly based on the glaring lack of Divine protection and the abuse and persecution the Jews continuously suffer. R' Yehoshua's response: "His hand is still outstretched upon us"; hence, He has not, in fact, abandoned us.

The great Talmudic commentator the Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, 1555-1631) is bothered by Rabbi Yehoshua's answer. Rabbi Yehoshua, in his rejoinder, was alluding to a verse in Isaiah which is actually referring to the punishing arm of G-d. In what way was R' Yehoshua rebutting the heretic's point!? The verse, in fact, seems to strengthen the claim!

The Bais Halevi (Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, 1820-1892) explains that Rabbi Yehoshua intentionally brought the verse which discusses Divine punishment to show that these difficulties are not symbolic of an apathetic or even hateful Master. Rather, they are the product of a special love. And while we cannot claim to understand the full breadth and depth of G-d's plans and its ramifications, we can strive to accept it. To believe that these difficult but necessary steps ensure the health and continued existence of our nation.

The eternal message of Rabbi Yehoshua is that even in punishment - especially in punishment - G-d's guiding, loving hand is yet upon us.

This idea is mirrored in the first verse of our parsha, which states, "You are standing today, all of you." The Medrash Tanchuma explains that this verse follows the long list of curses of the previous section of the Torah to teach us a deep lesson. If the Jewish nation strays from G-d's commandments to the point that G-d fulfills the admonition in its entirety, not only will the Jewish nation survive

Stories For The Soul

Law of Return

A young Israeli man brought up on a secular kibbutz became interested in a Torah-observant lifestyle, and joined a yeshiva. In time, he became fully observant of Torah and mitzvos. His father, an ardently secular individual, was quite upset by his son's choice, and he stormed into the yeshiva. "I was brought up in a Torah-observant home, but I left it behind because I had no use for it," exclaimed the father. "I want my son to follow in my footsteps!"

The Rabbi calmly looked at the father and replied, "But he is following in your footsteps! You abandoned the lifestyle of your parents. Your son has done exactly the same!"

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us that a time will come when G-d will circumcise the hearts of the Jewish People and bring them back to Him. As we come ever closer to the era of Moshiach, we can see the beginning of the process, as Jews who were distant from Torah have come streaming back to Hashem.

Kollel Happenings

**KOLLEL'S DONOR APPRECIATION
EVENT SEP. 10TH**

The Kollel will be holding its annual Donor Appreciation Event on Tuesday, September 10th, 7 pm, at the home of Dov & Lara Mowszowski, 6656 E. Prentice Ave, Greenwood Village, CO 80111. To RSVP please email info@denverkollel.org.

PARSHA ON THE MALL

Wish you could learn more about the weekly parsha? Looking to add some Torah study and inspiration to your busy day? Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher as he explores several parts of the weekly parsha at this exciting and intriguing class. Wednesday from 1-2 pm in downtown Denver at 910 16th St. 2nd floor. Refreshments are served. Email rmf@denverkollel.org to confirm class.

A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm.

Interpersonal Issues

The Laws of Lashon Hara (Slander)

Even where one may judge an act as improper, it is forbidden to tell others of what transpired, unless a number of

conditions are met. These conditions will be discussed at a later point.

Ask the Rabbi A Pointed Question

From: B. Altman

Dear Rabbi,

There is a custom to remove knives from the table before *Birkas Hamazon* (Blessing After Meals). What is the reason for this, and does it include plastic knives?

Dear B. Altman,

There are two main reasons for removing knives prior to *Birkas Hamazon*. First, the Talmud relates that a person was once reciting *Birkas Hamazon*. When he came to the third blessing in which we ask G-d to rebuild Jerusalem and the Holy Temple, he became so distraught at the thought of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, that he picked up a knife from the table and stabbed himself.

Because of this event, we remove the knives on the one hand to recall how strongly we should feel about the destruction of the Temple and desire its restoration, while removing the possibility that the event described in the Talmud be repeated.

It's for this reason that the knives are not removed for Blessing After Meals on Shabbos: to indicate that on such a

holy day as the Sabbath we are not to feel sad, nor are we capable of being so sad as to allow such an incident to happen.

Another reason for removing knives is based on the idea that a table one dines on is compared to the altar in the Holy Temple. Just as it is forbidden to use any iron utensil when hewing the stones for the altar, so too, we remove any metal knives from the table/altar prior to *Birkas Hamazon*.

According to both reasons above, one would not have to remove plastic knives. Regarding the first reason, plastic knives aren't "lethal" in the classic sense, so they are not considered dangerous in this context. Regarding the second, the concern is specifically regarding metal instruments, but knives of other materials should be okay.

Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, *shlita*, was asked this question and concurred that one need not remove plastic knives before *Birkas Hamazon*.

Sources: *Shulchan Aruch* 180:5; *Aruch HaShulchan* 180:5; and *Rokeach* 332.

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A Taste of Torah Fighting a Different Battle

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and prosper in spite of the mind boggling difficulties, it will thrive and stand before G-d today because of those very same difficulties!

May we heed G-d's warning in this time of introspection and repentance and recognize our hardships as G-d lovingly calling us home.