



Parshas Emor

May 12, 2017

A Taste of Torah

More than Shoelaces

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Life is sacrosanct in Judaism, and halacha goes to great lengths to ensure the preservation of human life - even if it means transgressing mitzvos of the Torah. In this week's parsha, though, Hashem commands us to sanctify his Name among the Jewish People. This commandment is the source of a mitzvah commonly known as *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of G-d's Name, which requires a Jew to give up his life rather than transgress.

There are three basic situations where one must die rather than transgress: 1) A sin that involves any of the three cardinal sins - idolatry, forbidden relationships, or murder - or their corollaries. 2) A Jew is given a choice to commit a sin or die in the presence of ten Jews - and he is being forced in order to cause him to transgress (and not simply for the personal benefit of the person coercing him). This is true even if the person is being forced to merely abandon a Jewish custom. This is known in the Talmud as *araksa dimisa'ana*, a shoelace, for the Jews wore distinct shoelaces. One must give his life rather than change his shoelace to match that of the gentile populace. 3) A decree is issued by the government requiring Jews to transgress for the purpose of *shmad* (to cause the Jews to abandon their religion). Here, too, one must forfeit his life even if the decree is only against a custom.

It is fairly simple to understand why one must die rather than commit any of the three cardinal sins, as they are severe transgressions. Similarly, in the presence of ten Jews, the obligation of *Kiddush Hashem* mandates that one not transgress any mitzvah. But how

are we to understand the requirement to die rather than change a shoelace? What is the severity of changing a shoelace that necessitates the loss of a life?

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906-1980) explains that the issue is not the abandonment of a custom - no custom possesses the spiritual weight to require one to lose his life. Rather, it is the fact that this decree is part of a decree of *shmad*, an attempt to destroy Judaism. This decree puts the very identity of a Jew at risk, and submission to the demand is a step, however small, toward abandoning one's status as a Jew. It is this critical reality that requires one to sacrifice his life, for the alternative, sacrificing one's Jewishness, is untenable.

We are blessed to live in a time and place where we are largely free to practice our religion without persecution. At the same time, we are also very much a part of the society around us. The culture, notions, and customs practiced by others easily seep into our lives. While perhaps small and initially non-threatening, a Jew can begin to slip away from his core identity, to disconnect from the inner spark that makes him a part of G-d's Chosen Nation. Even changing a shoelace can require one to give up his life - how careful we must be that even subtle, slight deviations not occur! It is imperative that we keep a sharp eye on what elements of the surrounding world we allow to infiltrate our lives and homes, and ensure that we continue to exist as a unique People, G-d's light unto the Nations, for all time.

Stories For The Soul

Nothing Else Left To Do

based on story on retach.net

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lau, the rav of Piotrkov, Poland, stemmed from a line of 36 generations of Rabbanim. In 1942, the Nazis sent most of the Jews of Piotrkov to Treblinka. Before the final selection of the Jews, Rabbi Lau directed his wife and child, Yisrael Meir (who later became the Chief Rabbi of Israel) to a hiding place. He himself refused to hide, for he knew the Nazis would search for him, and, in doing so, would find others hiding. He was sent to Treblinka along with 28,000 other Jews.

On the very day Rabbi Lau arrived in Treblinka, another group of Jews arrived from Peshov, Slovakia. Rabbi Lau had been the rav there before moving to Piotrkov eight years earlier, and the community of Peshov had not appointed another rabbi since his departure. These two cities were completely different worlds. In Peshov, they spoke German and Hungarian; in Piotrkov, they spoke Yiddish and Polish. The one thing that these two cities shared was the fact that the last rav of Peshov was also the last rav of Piotrkov. On the way to the gas chambers in Treblinka, the Jews of Peshov and the Jews of Piotrkov met with their rav.

Rabbi Lau stood before his flock and repeated the words of Rabbi Akiva. As the Romans brutally flayed him with combs of steel, his students asked him how he bore his suffering. Rabbi Akiva answered, "All my days, I worried about the verse, "You shall love Hashem... with all your life," (Devarim 6:5) wondering when I would be able to fulfill it."

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Kollel Happenings

LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM ON MAY 28TH

Join the communal completion of an entire tractate of Talmud in the course of one hour of Torah study! Men, sign up and study a preassigned section of Tractate Kiddushin with a class or chavrusah. Women, sign up and attend a special study session or learn a special curriculum with a chavrusah. Visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855.

TOUGH LOVE: DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT PARENT AT NEXT TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Ari Hoffman, Counselor, MA, LPC, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore this emotionally-fraught and sensitive subject. Wednesday, June 7, at 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When washing one's hands for bread, is it more halachically problematic to speak unnecessarily between the washing and its *bracha* (blessing) of *Al Netilas Yadayim*, or between the *bracha* and the *bracha* of *Hamotzi*?

A: It is assumed by many that interruptions between the washing and its *bracha*, even when unrelated to the washing or meal, are permitted, at least in cases of necessity. However, it seems that not only is this assumption mistaken, it may even be more serious than an interruption between the *bracha* and *Hamotzi*! The Shulchan Aruch quotes opposing views whether interrupting unnecessarily between *Al Netilas Yadayim* and *Hamotzi* is forbidden. Although one should preferably refrain from doing so, if one has interrupted, rewashing is not required. Interrupting unnecessarily between the washing and *Al Netilas*

Yadayim, however, is more severe. If one makes a *bracha* on a mitzvah, such as for counting the Omer, and then interrupts unnecessarily before the counting, the *bracha* is no longer associated with the mitzvah and must be repeated. The same applies for interruptions between *brachos* on food items and the subsequent first bite. Many halachic authorities rule that *brachos* recited after the mitzvah, such as washing for bread, are subject to similar guidelines, and an interruption between the mitzvah and *bracha* will invalidate the *bracha*!

(Sources: Orach Chaim 166, Mishna Berurah *ibid.*:6, 167:6 and Piskei Teshuvos Orach Chaim 158:23)

This week's question: Why is the *bracha* recited only *after* kindling the Shabbos lights, an exception to the general rule to recite the *bracha* before performing the mitzvah?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles - Part VII

The Rema wrote several other works. *Toras Hachatas* is a work that focuses primarily on the laws of kashrus. *Toras Ha'olah* is an aggadic work that focuses on the deeper meaning of the *Bais Hamikdash* and the sacrifices and service that took place therein. The Rema wrote a commentary on *Megillas Esther* titled *Mechir Yayin*, and he also published a collection of his halachic responsa.

The famed Rema Shul in Krakow was, according to its foundation tablet, built in 1553. There are several different explanations as to the origins of the

synagogue. One tradition states that Rabbi Yisrael, the Rema's father, built it in honor of his young but very scholarly son. Another approach is that Rabbi Yisrael built the synagogue in memory of his wife, Malka, who passed away in 1552 during an epidemic. Rabbi Yisrael also lost his mother and daughter-in-law, the Rema's first wife, during the epidemic. This tradition would seem to be backed up by an inscription in the foundation stone that indicates that it was indeed built in memory of Malka by Rabbi Yisrael. Yet a third opinion says the synagogue was built by the Rema himself in memory of his first wife, Golda.

Stories For The Soul

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Rabbi Lau then said, "My fellow Jews, of all the 613 mitzvos, one mitzvah is left in our hands to fulfill, 'and I will be sanctified among the Children of Israel,' (Emor 22:32) through martyrdom. Come, brothers, let us fulfill this mitzvah with joy! Rabbi Simcha

Bunim of Peshischa said, "The power of joy will save us from all troubles and the suffering of this world." Rabbi Lau then raised his voice and began to say *vidui* (confession) and the Jews answered after him, whereupon they went to their deaths.