

A Taste of Torah

Un-Gifted Individuals

By Rabbi Shachne Sommers

Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, the Chief Rabbi of the town of Brisk in Eastern Europe, arrived penniless in the Land of Israel during World War II. Upon his arrival, he was detained by the British authorities because he lacked money to pay the necessary immigration fees. A number of people offered to pay the fees for him but the Rabbi adamantly refused. He would not accept a gift from anyone. Only after a representative of the townspeople of Brisk offered him a salary payment for continuing to be their rabbi were the fees paid.

A hint as to the reason for R' Soloveitchik's puzzling behavior may be found in this week's parsha. G-d had given Moshe the mission of taking the Jewish People out of Egypt through the process of the Ten Plagues. However, regarding the first three plagues, we find that G-d tells Moshe to have his brother Aharon, rather than Moshe himself, be the one to activate the plague. The reason, explains Rashi (quoting a Midrash), is that the first two plagues

involved doing something negative to the Nile and the third involved doing something negative to the dust of the earth. Moshe owed his life to the Nile (where he was hidden in infancy) and to the dust of the earth (which covered the dead Egyptian whom he had killed), and it was therefore inappropriate for him to act negatively toward them.

We learn from this an important principle. Someone in a position of leadership often needs to take action that will impact negatively on certain individuals. However, if the leader owes a debt of gratitude to those individuals, it is not appropriate for him to be the one to take that negative action. If the action must be done, the leader should find someone else to do it.

Rav Soloveitchik was entering a land where he was to become a great leader of the community. A leader who becomes indebted to the people whom he is to lead is unable to lead properly. Accepting a gift at that time would be creating a handicap for himself that could greatly impair his leadership abilities later on.

Ask the Rabbi

Vote!

Lena wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My question is: Does a Jew have an obligation to vote in an election?

Dear Lena,

In countries where you're obligated by law to vote, such as Australia and Belgium, one would be obligated to vote based on the concept "dina d'malchusa dina - the laws of the land are law." This means that a Jew is obligated to follow the laws of the country in which he lives.

In countries where voting is

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Stories For The Soul

The Immovable Moved

After the plague of hail, Pharaoh summoned Moshe and Aaron to his palace and proclaimed, "Hashem is righteous." (Exodus 9:27).

What made him say this? One opinion states that he was reacting to Hashem's warning "Send forth, gather in your flocks [indoors so that they would not get hurt by the falling hailstones]" (Exodus 9:19). Pharaoh was moved by the fact that even in the midst of administering a punishment, Hashem showed compassion for the animals.

Another opinion states that he was reacting to the fact that the hail fell within all the borders of Egypt, but not one inch beyond. As a matter of fact, this helped settle a border dispute that Egypt had with one of its neighbors. Pharaoh was moved by the precision Hashem exacted in His punishment.

According to either of these two opinions, we see that even people who are removed from kindness or righteousness are moved when they see a noble act, as the following true story illustrates:

Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman was a young European immigrant who built up a successful business in New York City from scratch, while maintaining strict observance of Torah, Shabbos, kashrus, and all other mitzvos during the early 20th century - a time when Torah was widely abandoned in America. His dedication was legendary.

In their later years, Rabbi & Mrs. Herman decided to move to Eretz Yisroel. Due to unforeseen delays, their ship arrived at the port in Israel late Friday afternoon with only a few minutes remaining before Shabbos. The lift containing all their worldly possessions was unloaded on the dock.

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Kollel Happenings

'MEDICAL MARIJUANA' AT JAN. 5 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Ean Seeb, Owner, Denver Relief, and Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers for "Medical Marijuana: Is it Kosher?" at the next Torah for Tycoons, Wed., Jan. 5. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. CLE credits pending. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., JAN. 10

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., Jan. 10, at 12:30 p.m. at Colorado Capital Bank, 55 Madison Ave. The class focuses on Pirkei Avos. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or at rya@denverkollel.org



BLOOD BOILS & BEYOND AT JAN. 11 BAIS YAAKOV FOR ADULTS

"Blood, Boils and Beyond," a Bais Yaakov for Adults class for women, will take place on Tues., Jan 11. The class, led by Mrs. Avigail Steinharter, will be held at Aish Ahavas Yisroel, and will take a closer look at the ten plagues of Egypt. Cost is \$5 or \$25 for all six upcoming classes. To RSVP, contact Mrs. Esti Schwab at 303-668-1878 or estischwab@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Borrowing Without Permission Part III

Using someone else's possessions without authorization applies to land and buildings as well. For example, one may not park his car in another's driveway (even if the owner will certainly not use it for that period of time) because the average person will object to having his driveway parked in. Cutting across a lawn or backyard presents a similar

problem.

However, if one is certain that the owner doesn't mind if others cut across his lawn or through his yard, it is permitted.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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not obligatory by civil law, a Jew nevertheless has a responsibility to actively help in establishing a just society. As our Sages say "Pray for the peace of the kingdom (government) for if not for the fear of it, people would

swallow each other alive." Voting is one way of helping establish a better society, and hence one has a responsibility to do so.

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Stories for the Soul

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All their furniture, clothing, appliances, jewelry, family heirlooms; everything they owned was on that lift.

Rabbi Herman was told that he had to take it all off the dock before he left. He replied that he had to leave immediately because Shabbos was fast approaching and there was not enough time to move everything and get to his place of lodging in time for Shabbos. He would have to leave everything where it was and come back for it on Saturday night after Shabbos was over.

The officer looked at him incredulously, "You can't do that! All goods are always cleared from the docks immediately after arrival. We do not ever store or guard anything. If you come back Saturday night, nothing will be left. It will all be strewn about or stolen."

"So be it!" said Rabbi Herman unflinchingly, "I will not violate Shabbos no matter what the cost!" It was not

negotiable. Rabbi. & Mrs. Herman promptly left the dock and spent their first Shabbos in Eretz Yisroel.

On Saturday night they returned to the dock fully expecting to find nothing, but hoping they could salvage at least a few items. Much to their shock they saw their entire lift, completely intact, right where they left it. The Chief Harbor Officer explained, "When all of the dock workers saw that on Friday you were willing to walk away from everything you owned in the world for the sake of upholding your religious conviction, we were amazed. We decided that we could not allow you to lose out, so we organized a special round-the-clock guard of your lift. Everything is right here as you left it. Nothing was touched."

Indeed, something was touched - the hearts and souls of all those men.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman