

A Taste of Torah Things Don't Change

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

The saintly Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, 1838-1933) needed a passport from the Polish government. But they refused to provide one to him. The reason? The official told him that in order for him to issue a passport, the Chofetz Chaim would have to bring two witnesses who could attest to his family name at the time of his birth. No big deal, right? Wrong. The Chofetz Chaim was around eighty years old; any witness who could reliably testify to his birth would have to be around ninety-five and would have to be from the little shtetl where he was born! No matter how the Chofetz Chaim pleaded and explained the ludicrousness of the demand and the impossibility of acceding to it, the Polish official refused to budge.

The Chofetz Chaim commented that he now understood a difficult passage in the Torah. In this week's parsha, Ya'akov flees from his father-in-law Lavan. Lavan gives chase, intending to wipe out Ya'akov and his entire family. Hashem, however, intervenes, and comes to Lavan in a dream and warns him not to harm Ya'akov. Lavan is left with nothing to do except complain to Ya'akov, and to accuse him of deception. Ya'akov responds with a lengthy account of his honesty and integrity for the

entire twenty-year period that he worked for Lavan, despite Lavan's constant treacherous swindling.

At this point, Lavan should have been left speechless; after all, he knew that Ya'akov was absolutely correct. But Lavan is not silenced easily. He responds, "The daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons; the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine." (31:43) Lavan's response seems nonsensical; he is completely ignoring the validity of Ya'akov's claim and instead is ranting about how everything that Ya'akov possesses is, in fact, his.

Explained the Chofetz Chaim, Lavan's answer to Ya'akov was: you may be right, but who cares? You have no right to any claim at all! No matter what you say, you are entitled to nothing! It's all mine, regardless of the injustice!

Continued the Chofetz Chaim, this is how we, Ya'akov's descendants, are treated in exile, as well. The ridiculousness of the official's demand is of no consequence; the validity of my request makes no difference. As a Jew, I have no right to make any claim at all!

And so, as we continue to await the arrival of Moshiach, we must remember that as long as we are in exile, the world will never recognize our claims, no matter how correct they may be...

Stories For The Soul

A Bond Like No Other

Dear Susan,

When Mom told me that she was expecting, I was ecstatic. I imagined how wonderful you would be and how much you would look like me. We took you home from the hospital and I showed you proudly to my friends. But when you were five months old, you seemed so unmoving and numb.

The thirteenth doctor told Mom you would never walk nor talk. I was furious. I realized that word would get around that you're not normal. So I did the unthinkable... I disowned you. I steeled myself not to love you. Mom and Dad showered you with love and that made me bitter. And as the years passed, that bitterness turned to anger, and then hate.

And then one day, you defied what all your doctors said - you crawled. And then you walked.

Over the years, Mom taught you to speak, read and write. I would sometimes see you walk outside, smell the flowers, marvel at the birds, or just smile at no one. I began to see the beauty of the world through your eyes. I realized that you were my sister and that I had grown to love you.

After that, we again became friends. I would buy you toys and give you all the love that a sister could give. And you would reward me by smiling and hugging me.

But I guess, you were never really meant for us. On your tenth birthday, you felt severe headaches. The doctor's diagnosis: leukemia.

I remember our last conversation. You said that if you die, and if I need

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Join Mrs. Esti Schwab for "Revisiting Women of the Bible." This four-part series will help you gain a better understanding and a new appreciation of the great women of the Book of Genesis: Chava (Eve), Sara (Sarah), Rivka (Rebecca), Rochel (Rachel), & Leah. Classes will be held on Sundays from 11:30 am-12:30 pm at Barnes & Noble (960 S. Colorado Blvd.)



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Interpersonal Issues Bal Tolin

If someone gave an item to a craftsman for repairs, and the craftsman informed him that the item is ready, there is no bal tolin as long as the craftsmen still has the item. Once the item is received, payment must be made before sundown

(or sunrise, if it was received at night) to avoid bal tolin.

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

Ask the Rabbi Together Alone

Name Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a college girl and I work for an Orthodox health care professional. I was wondering if the laws of yichud [the prohibition of a man and woman being together in private] apply in the workplace. I am asking because all day long the front door to the office is open and patients come through; however, as soon as the last patient leaves, my employer locks the office door. Is it halachically wrong? If it is wrong, and I suspect it is, is there a respectful way to tell him about this? Any advice that you could pass along would be greatly appreciated.

Dear Name Withheld,

You're right. If the door is locked, then there is a prohibition of yichud, even if both people are religious Jews. Yichud is

not so much a matter of suspicion, but rather it is an independent prohibition. The intimacy of being alone together in a private place is reserved only for husband and wife. In fact, part of the marriage ceremony is the cheder yichud, the privacy room, where the bride and groom go to be alone together for the first time.

As for telling him without hurting his feelings, I suggest that you not tell him, but rather ask him about it. For example, you could mention that you were reading a book about the subject and it appeared that your situation is prohibited. You could ask, "Do you know about this issue? It seems pretty easy to avoid, we just leave the door open a little, right?" For sources on the subject I suggest the book Halichos Bas Yisrael.

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Stories for the Soul

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help, I could send a note to heaven by tying it on the string of a balloon.

That last night, with my tears flowing freely, I watched the bravest girl I had ever known finally stop breathing. You were my source of inspiration. You made me realize that the most important thing in this life is to continue loving without asking why or how and without

setting any limit. Thank you, my little sister, for everything.

As wives of Yaakov, Rochel and Leah seemed to be in competition, but they were actually extremely loving sisters who sacrificed for each other. Despite trials and tribulations, sisters have a powerful innate bond of love.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.