

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In last week's Torah portion, we learned about the Revelation on Mount Sinai. This week, in Mishpatim, the text begins by delineating some of the many practical laws which the Torah contains. The first subject dealt with is, "If you buy a Hebrew servant." This pertains to a Jew who was sold into servitude by the courts in order to make restitution for stealing, or one who sells himself due to his great poverty.

At first glance, it seems odd that the Torah would begin with this subject first. After all, in the generation of Jews who left Egypt, there were no Hebrew servants! The Children of Israel were all very wealthy, having received many gifts of gold and silver from the Egyptians before they left, and from the great riches they plucked as they passed through the Red Sea. There were no poor people who had to sell themselves into slavery. And even if there were those who succumbed to the prohibition "Thou shalt not covet" and actually stole something, they were all sufficiently wealthy to be able to pay back the rightful owner twice, or however many times the value of the stolen object, as prescribed by Torah law. Why then does the Torah choose precisely this subject to begin the portion dealing with practical commandments, those governing man's relationship with his fellow man--the laws of offerings, festivals and the like?

The section on the Hebrew servant, more than any other commandment, illustrates the effect the Revelation on Mount Sinai had on this world. With this mitzva, more so than with others, we see a direct cause and effect between the sin and its punishment. If a Hebrew slave does not desire to be freed after six years of servitude, his punishment is "and his master should bore his ear through with an awl."

The commentator Rashi explains that this ear, which heard the prohibition uttered on Mount Sinai against stealing and committed thievery anyway, deserves to be bored through. This ear, which heard G-d declare that the Jewish people are His servants alone--yet wants to remain a slave to a human master--deserves to be pierced. In many instances of Torah law, we do not find such a direct cause and effect between a wrongdoing and its rectification. For example, the Torah promises that the reward for honoring one's parents is longevity, but we don't always perceive this connection. Similarly, punishments may also seem to have little connection to the sin committed. However, the penalty for a Hebrew slave who refuses to be set free is one instance in which the punishment is an obvious consequence of the actions.

When the Torah was given it enabled the spiritual and physical world to influence each other. Prior to that time, the spiritual and material were sealed off from one another--each realm remained isolated and distinct. The Hebrew slave is an example to illustrate this innovation, for his spiritual defect found a physical expression, one which could be seen by all. Furthermore, Chasidic philosophy explains that the Hebrew bondsman also symbolizes man's obligation to subjugate his baser instincts and desires in the service of G-d. After the Revelation, the road to spirituality is paved by our properly utilizing physical reality in the service of holiness.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

No Deposit, No Return

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

There is a line in this week's parshah concerning the Jewish bondsman. Im b'gapo yavo, b'gapo yeitzei -- if he came in alone, he goes out alone. If he entered his period of service unmarried, he must leave unmarried and his master may not exploit him to father children who would be born into servitude. But this Torah phrase has become a traditional way of expressing one of life's basic home truths, i.e. no deposit, no return. No effort, no reward.

Whether in business, relationships, or in raising our children, the principle holds true. In the words of the Psalmist, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

There is the story of Shmerel, a poor man who once walked by the home of the richest man in the shtetl and smelled the tantalizing aroma of the wealthy man's favorite dish, cheese blintzes. Shmerel took one whiff and just had to taste those blintzes. As soon as he comes home, he begs his good wife, Chasha, to make him some of those blintzes. Chasha says, "I'd love to make you blintzes, Shmerel, but I have no cheese." "Nu, my dear, so make it without the cheese." "But we've got no eggs either." "Chasha," says Shmerel, "you are a woman of great ingenuity. I'm sure you can make a plan." So Chasha sets

out to do the very best she can under the circumstances. Her work done, she sets the plate of blintzes in front of her dear husband. Shmerel takes one taste, crooks his nose and says, "You know Chasha, for the life of me, I cannot understand what those rich people see in blintzes."

Clearly, you cannot make good blintzes without using the right ingredients. Just as clearly, we cannot have nachas from our children without putting in the necessary ingredients of a good Jewish education, a solid upbringing at home, quality family time, and above all, by setting a good example.

Too many parents assume that nachas is a democratic right, almost a genetic certainty. If parents are good people and committed Jews, then surely their children will turn out the same. But there are no such guarantees.

As Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch said, "Just as it is a Biblical commandment to put on tefillin every day, so is it obligatory to spend a half hour daily thinking about our children and to do whatever possible to ensure that they follow the path in which they are being guided."

So don't be a dreamer. Put in the effort, and please G-d, you will see the rewards. Whether it's our work or our children, may we enjoy the fruit of our labors.

SLICE OF LIFE

My Plane Was Diverted To Paris!

By Rabbi Uriel Vigler



I was heading back to New York after spending a few magical days in Israel, visiting our Belev Echad team and having back-to-back meetings with all our staff there.

My flight was scheduled to depart at 1 am, landing in Newark at 5 am, and I figured I'd be able to get home before traffic built up.

I was in Jerusalem with my daughter that night, and suddenly we found ourselves in an extensive traffic jam. There was a protest going on, and we simply couldn't move. The longer we sat, the more certain I became that I would miss my flight. Fortunately, the police showed up and directed us all to make a U-turn on the highway, and I made it to Ben Gurion in time.

Exhausted after my whirlwind few days, I was deep asleep mid-flight when an announcement roused me. "If there are any doctors on board, please

see a stewardess." I know my brother is a doctor, but there's nothing I can do in these situations, so I let myself fall back asleep.

About an hour later, all the lights came on and the pilot announced that due to a medical emergency on board, we would be heading back and landing in Europe.

A quick look at the flight map revealed that we were at least an hour across the Atlantic Ocean, and now we would be turning around and heading back. Oy gevalt!

I asked the stewardess where we would be landing, but they didn't know yet. An hour later, the pilot announced we'd be landing at Charles-de-Gaulle in Paris.

After asking for further clarification, I was told that an elderly woman had fallen mid-flight, hit her head and passed out. Even after she regained consciousness, the flight attendants were concerned and felt she needed urgent medical attention, so they made the decision to turn around and head back to Europe.

We were on the ground in Paris for about an hour. An ambulance arrived to transport the woman and her family to a local hospital, and after that we continued on our way back to Newark.

What should have been an 11-hour flight turned into a 15-hour ordeal, and we landed at Newark around 9 am (I definitely didn't miss traffic!).

But here's the thing: There were hundreds of passengers on the flight. Hundreds of people were terribly inconvenienced. Including me. I hate flying and try not to spend an extra minute in the air. Can't stand it. But despite the inconvenience, not a single

passenger complained or protested or blew a temper. Incredible!

Why? People are so testy when traveling, why did everyone on our flight take it in stride? Because there was a medical emergency with another passenger, and we all care. Deep down we all love one another. We have compassion. We know that it could be us or one of our loved ones. Everyone on that flight knew that we were all in it together and there was nothing we could do but have patience and wish her the best!

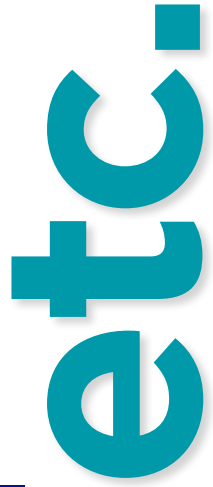
What a lesson this was for me—and for all of us. We are all on one big massive plane together. It's called "the world." And every action we take or don't take affects everyone else.

Just like one woman's head injury on an ELAL flight affected every single passenger who had to spend an extra four hours on the plane (and let's be real, we all hate flying!), so does one Jew's mitzvah in London affect every other Jew on the planet.

When a Jew in Japan, or Johannesburg, or New York, or Los Angeles does a mitzvah—or G-d forbid a sin—it sends ripples of waves across the universe, impacting all of us.

This woman hurt herself by accident and affected everyone on the plane—imagine how much more impact we have when we do an intentional mitzvah!

So think about what you can do: ask someone to put on tefillin, pray with a minyan, eat a kosher meal, extend kindness and grace to those around you. You have immense power to influence the trajectory of the entire world, bringing ever closer Moshiach and the Final Redemption.



Architectural Excellence Meets Jewish Spirit in Rural New Jersey



When an architect has a dream to build a beautiful synagogue and teams up with a Chabad rabbi who has a vision for a dedicated community center, magic happens.

That is precisely what the Telyas Chabad Jewish Center of Hunterdon County, N.J., was recognized for when the center received the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Central New Jersey 2024 Design Award.

Even as the \$7.5 million, 23,000-square-foot building continues to rack up accolades, Rabbi Eli and Rachel Kornfeld, co-directors of Chabad-Lubavitch of Hunterdon County, are more concerned with what's happening inside the building—namely, the increase in Torah and mitzvot the upgraded Chabad center allows locals to achieve in Hunterdon County. Indeed the award-winning 23,000-square-foot Chabad center signals a thriving Jewish future.

CUSTOMS

Are there any special laws concerning "table-talk"?

Though we are enjoined to discuss matters relating to the Torah at every meal—since our table is considered an altar—we are instructed not to speak while actually eating, since one might choke by doing this.

(Kitzur Shulchan Aruch)

