



# Ohr Yerushalayim News

ב אלול תש"פ – שופטים – 22nd August 2020 - Volume 13 - Issue 7

## News This Week

### מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to David and Deborah Levine on the occasion of their 20th wedding anniversary.

### Chaim Aruchim

We wish Marilyn Sacho Chaim Aruchim on the recent petira of her mother in South Africa. She is sitting Shiva at 3 Moorside Road until Sunday morning and can be reached on 07914 200985

We wish Chaim Aruchim to the following on the occasion of the Yahrtzeit this week:

Sunday 3rd Elul Yosaif Bernhardt for his father

Tuesday 5th Elul Chani Steinberg for her mother

## Trees To Please

Avi Schwartz

Life, as a Jew lives it today, is all about navigating between gashmius (physicality) and ruchnius (spirituality). As R' Shaya recently mentioned in Shul, we have seen the internet and technology being used in unbelievable ways over lockdown. Classes, shiurim, chasunas, vorts, levayas, shiva, etc... all have benefited from the use of technology in that it is possible for people to participate in these communal activities via the computer and not in person. Yet we all know the pitfalls of this same technology. It has been used to destroy relationships, feed addictions and adversely affect children, teenagers and adults in all areas of life. This week's sedra shows that even though our issues today were not specifically referred to in Halacha, this balancing act was phrased in terms relevant to us today.

The overt topic in the Torah is the asheira tree. There may not be any in Heaton Park, but the Talmud tells us this was a beautiful tree which was so enchanting that people used to worship it. There was something attractive and exciting about an asheira tree. Worship of the asheira tree was very common in ancient Canaan, and Jewish people were often enticed into it. The Torah warns against it several times.

In the Torah there is an intriguing statement: "Do not plant an asheira or any tree near the Altar of G d" (Devarim 16:21).

Now, why would anyone want to plant an asheira tree in Beis HaMikdash? How can someone both want to worship H-shem in the Beis HaMikdash AND worship an asheira tree? What is the point of the end of the passuk?

I heard in the name of the Lubavitcher Rebbe that this passuk is speaking directly to those few who would have been responsible for the Beis HaMikdash. A very frum Yetzer Hara might speak to such a person and say that in order to increase the number of worshippers he should add things in order to draw more people in. True, it would be done lishma, for positive reasons, but the Torah is warning us not to pollute our pure intentions of worship with the flashing lights of modern society.

As someone with experience in kiruv rechokim, I was very guilty of this. On campus, we would try to draw Jewish students to talks and classes with free trips to exotic destinations, free food and drink and many other freebies in order to entice normally dormant Jewish students to come out and "do Jewish things" with the hopes of sparking their interest in their past, their heritage and their religion.

More often than not, nothing tangible really came from such activities. At best many Jewish students had what is called "a positive Jewish experience" and at worst the students wasted the opportunities for personal, spiritual growth of themselves and their peers. Regardless, the balance between the gashmius (physical "freebies") and ruchnius (spiritual growth) was unbelievably difficult to maintain, no matter how good the intentions were behind it.

And this is exactly what we are being warned off with the mitzvah of the asheira tree. This reality exhibits itself today with even more vigour and temptation than in the past. Yes, we have the ability to elevate the mundane and use these resources as a means to improve and increase Torah learning. We've seen it happen. But the flipside is that we become more and more reliant on it which increases the chances of falling victim to it, if and when we allow our Yetzer Hara to pounce.

So as we somewhat re-enter normalcy on a personal and societal level, let us remember and reflect on the mitzvah of the asheira tree and ensure that our own Batei Mikdash are kept clean and pure from negative and damaging outside influences. It is an ongoing battle, but one that can be won with continued and consistent energy to do so. Good Shabbos!

## In the Balance

Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities... (Devarim 16:18)

ANOTHER NAME FOR a judge is "Elohim," one of the few Names of G-d that can have a holy and profane meaning. Man was made be "b'tzelem Elokim," and we use the Kuf (k in English) instead of the actual Heh (h in English) because we are referring to G-d, so the Name is holy.

As the Sforno points out however on the actual verse (Bereishis 1:26), the goal of life is to drop the "tzelem" part and actually become an Elohim. Obviously, this does not mean to become an actual G-d, which is why we can pronounce it with the Heh. It refers to a particular potential man has to act like Elokim by being an Elohim.

The key to understanding this is in understanding what the Name "Elokim" means. It is a Name, the Sforno explains, that refers to G-d as judge, a discerning intellectual Being that weighs and evaluates facts in order to come to a truthful decision. When G-d does this, He is functioning in the capacity of Elokim. When a person does this, they are an Elohim.

The Rambam begins Hilchos Dayos by enumerating the various different types of personality traits, each of which has an extreme. That is the way many people tend to be, extreme in one trait or another. It's just easier that way. Then a person doesn't have to think about it that much, instead just leaving their decisions to "Default Mode."

The Rambam does not like that approach to life, because G-d doesn't. Instead he advocates a different approach altogether, and it has a tremendously profound origin. In fact, it goes back to the very beginning of history, to what we call "Tikun Ma'aseh Bereishis," the rectification of

## Davening Times

### פרשת שופטים

Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	7.15pm
Candle Lighting	7.27pm-7.40pm
Shacharis - Hashkomo	7.30am (שוכן עד 7.55am)
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.36am
2nd Shacharis	9.30am (שוכן עד 9.55am)
1st Mincha	2.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	8.10pm
Rov's Shiur	Following
Motzei Shabbos	9.15pm
Sun	7.30am / 8.30am / 9.15am
Mon - Wed	7.00am / 8.10am / 9.15am
Thurs / Fri Rosh Chodesh	6.50am / 8.10am / 9.15am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.00pm

Creation.

Kabbalah refers to it as the "Maskala," which is Aramaic for "mishkal," which is a scale. In general, a scale has two cups, and is used to weigh something by putting known weights on one side and balancing them out with an unknown weight on the other side. When both cups are at equal height, then their weights are the same.

The Maskala also has two sides, but they are opposites. In this type of scale, there is a third side that balances between the two of them. For example, Avraham was the trait of Chesed, which shares. Yitzchak was the opposite trait of Gevurah, which holds back. Ya'akov was Tifferes, which is the balance between the two of them. It is a mixture of Chesed and Gevurah, the percentage of each depending on the situation at the moment.

The intellectual process the Sforno refers to is called "shikol hada'as," the word "shikol" coming from the word "mishkal." That is what we are supposed to do when making decisions, especially ones with big consequences. We're supposed to gather in all the relevant information, then put it all on an intellectual scale, and mentally weigh it. The heavier side will be the one with that determines the weight of the sides in the discussion.

Hence, when the Talmud says that a person only sins as an act of insanity, it means that they wouldn't do the wrong thing (i.e. sin) if they properly weighed the issues. Therefore, the rabbis have said, "Reckon the loss [that may be sustained through the fulfillment] of a commandment against the reward [accruing] thereby, and the gain [that may be obtained through the committing] of a transgression against the loss [entailed] thereby" (Pirkei Avos 2:1).

That's how the yetzer hara works. He's a con man. He convinces the person that they are getting a better deal than they really are. By the time the person realizes they've been conned, like every con man, the yetzer hara is long gone, so-to-speak. It is the person himself who has to live with the consequences of their incomplete decision.

Unfortunately, too many people do not take decision making seriously enough, except perhaps when it comes to money. Money is such a central part of life, with consequences that are both tangible and immediate, that people realize they have to be careful when facing a risk. Then they make a point of gathering sufficient information, getting professional advice, and deliberating before making their financial move.

But other than that, people tend to sell themselves short when it comes to many of their life-impacting decisions. They either don't take them seriously enough, or feel that they can always fix things up later if they have to. It's only "later," once they have to face the reality of the consequences, that they realize the folly of such an approach.

It may seem that people are just lazy, only thinking when they have to. But have you ever seen how much energy some people will use just to avoid having to do something responsible? Rather, they just don't realize what it is that is keeping them from using that energy in a more responsible manner. If they did, they'd fight back and grow up.

The Talmud says that the yetzer hara of a person wakes up each day to kill them (Kiddushin 30b). Sometimes it does this literally, convincing a person that suicide is better than life. Most of the time, it just gets people to waste moments of life and squander opportunities for spiritual growth.

The first man's body came from the ground, and though all others have been born since then, they all still have a natural drive to return back to the ground. They want to die, and have a good time doing it. Any desire a person has to live is from their soul, which wants to return back to Heaven and ultimate life. The remainder of life, says the Ramchal, is just battle-after-battle between the yetzer tov, or the soul, and the yetzer hara, or the body. Ignorance is the body's best weapon, and it is amazing just how many stupid things people have done throughout history. It's not that they CHOSE to do the stupid thing. It's that they CHOSE to not think through what they were doing to come to the realization that it was the dumb thing to do. It was just a waste of a precious life.

The mind is the soul's best weapon. The truth is out there. It just has to be found by cutting through the jungle of ideas and confusion like a machete in a dense forest. Do that, and you will find the most meaningful approach to life in any given situation. A shikol hada'as will get a discerning mind to the bottom of just about any matter, and will provide a more accurate course to navigate through life.

It is for this that we are judged on Rosh Hashanah. The Bais Din sits down and looks at our decisions, and then how we arrived at them. If we did the necessary brain work, then we will be judged favorably, often even if we made a mistake. If we didn't, then we will be judged less favorably, even if it happened to turn out okay for us. We were made b'tzelem Elokim, and

our judgment depends on how much we lived up to that merit.

When a person does not work on becoming an Elohim, then their behavior becomes instinctual. Once that happens, then they act not much different than the animal world, no matter how much more sophisticated they seem to be. G-d didn't make man so He could be a divine zookeeper. He made man so that he could reflect the reality of G-d in the world. How well a person does this is a function of how much they are willing to use their brain.

## Who Was to Blame?

**Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein (Torah.org)**

Atonement for Your people Israel that You have redeemed.

Chazal parse this pasuk, and see separate references to two groups. "Your people Israel," they say, refers to the living; "That you have redeemed," to the dead. We must ask why the living require atonement? Moreover, the dead, we would think, require neither atonement nor redemption.

We can explain in two different ways, one examining the plain sense of the text, and the other taking into account a deeper, more hidden level of understanding it.

First, according to the plain meaning, our parshah speaks of the great value of levaya/accompanying a person for a while on his journey. Chazal imply that such accompaniment provides protection from danger for both the traveler and his companion. Had someone accompanied the murder victim out of the city, he would have not met any harm.

Who was to blame? It might have been the dead, i.e. the victim himself! Had he not kept his plans to himself, someone would have come forward to accompany him. By not announcing his intentions, he caused his own death – and requires atonement for the shedding of his own blood! (His death is called "redemption," because death releases a person from the constant struggle with the yetzer hora.)

It might be the case, however, that it never even occurred to the victim that he should have sought levaya. He might have been completely unaware of its protective nature. Perhaps the rabbanim of the city had failed to teach and to emphasize its importance. If that was the case, then the living – the inhabitants of the city – require kapparah for not properly educating everyone about this important practice.

Alternatively, we can detect a second approach to our parshah by noting its juxtaposition to what precedes it: "When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it...do not destroy its trees."The city might be an allusion to the individual, in the same manner as the "small city, and few people in it, and a great king comes against it."This is interpreted as an allusion to the constant besieging of a person by the yetzer hora. Similarly, here in our section of Devarim, the city may represent an individual taking strong measures against his own impulses. Wishing to rid himself of his weakness for comfort and pleasure, he besieges his own being. He attempts for long periods of time to deaden parts of himself through constant fasts, privation, and self-denial.

To such a person the Torah speaks, "Do not destroy its trees."Don't damage the body. "Only a tree that know is not a food tree, it you may destroy."Only those things that are completely non-essential – things that are luxuries – you may rid yourself of.

You might counter that the gemara relates several stories about individuals who, as part of their repentance, practiced self-denial to the point of death. We should not learn from them; this is not the best way to go. Possibly, those individuals knew enough about themselves that there was no way back from their sin other than in extreme measures against the body. They do not serve as a general model.

This is the other message of our section. "If a corpse will be found...[and] it was not known who smote him." No one knows why he died. No one killed him! He died through his own ill-advised practice of abusing himself. Tragically, he was not aware of better ways to live. The townspeople had not broadcast proper conduct and behavior to the masses. They must all gather and perform the mitzvah of the decapitated heifer. They all need atonement – the living, and the one who died through his own actions. The living declare that their hands did not shed his blood – at least not directly. That, however, does not acquit them. "Our eyes did not see." They must say that they were unaware of the way he was treating himself. Had they known, they would have intervened and reasoned with him. Furthermore, they were not aware of such conduct in general. If they had been, they would have taken steps to properly educate the community to stay away from practices of mortifying the flesh.

Even if that declaration is true, they still require atonement. People are obligated to learn – and to anticipate crucial needs of the community, even when they have no personal experience with them!