



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Chizky and Avital Salomon on the birth of a grandson to Eli and Ruthie Salomon

Mazel tov to Eric and Sue Sievers on the wedding in Yerushalayim next week of their granddaughter Hadassah Leah Davis to Meir Simcha Levine

Chaim Aruchim

We wish Chaim Aruchim to R' Yosef Yitzchok Chalomish for the Yahrzeit of his mother on Tuesday 14th Av

To'ameho

There is no To'ameho from this week till after the holidays

A Different Light

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Torah.org)

This week the Jewish nation is told that they are held to a higher standard. The Torah commands us to heed its words and follow the Chukim (decrees), "for (those laws) are your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these decrees and declare, 'surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation.'"

The Jewish People were the founders of moral civilization. The famed apostate Benjamin Disraeli once retorted to an anti-Semitic invective by parliamentarian Daniel O'Connell, "when the ancestors of the right honorable gentlemen were brutal savages on an unknown island mine were priests in Solomon's Temple."

This is easily understood in the context of Mishpatim, or laws that have seemingly clear reasons. The Torah's judicial system and codification of tort law are the blueprint for common law the world over. Yet the Torah does not emphasize observance of Mishpatim as such. It tells us that in order to be an example of wisdom and clarity unto the nations, we must observe the Chukim, laws that are difficult to comprehend even for those born as Jews.

The question is obvious: wouldn't the open observance of the esoteric laws of Judaism bring question if not contempt to the eyes of the nations? Why are Chukim specifically rendered as the acts that will have the world look at us and say, "surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation."

In 1993, six years after the death of my revered grandfather, a biography, "Reb Yaakov, the Life and Times of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky," was printed by Mesorah Publications. Based on years of my uncle, Rabbi Nossan Kamenetzky's research and the fine writing of Yonason Rosenbloom, it was an instant success. The book shed unseen light on a Torah giant, perhaps never known by the masses. In addition to the splendid biographical research, the book is filled with hundreds of encounters with myriad personalities who were touched by the brilliant sage. From young children to Prime ministers and United States Senators, Reb Yaakov was able to relate to each of them on their level.

The book also relates how Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan revealed to an Orthodox publication how surprised he had been when Reb Yaakov made a prescient prediction that the Soviet Union would cease to exist.

Our Yeshiva had purchased 10,000 volumes of the book as a fundraising -educational mailer. I did not realize that the Senator's name happened to be on our mailing list until I received a beautiful letter on United States Senate stationery. After thanking me for sending the "wonderful book," the writer said, "If I may quibble with one small point in an otherwise brilliant volume, the author reports that I was surprised by Rabbi Kamenetzky's prediction of the fall of the Soviet Union.

"Truth be told, I was never surprised by Rabbi Kamenetzky's insights. They

only reaffirmed to me the age-old biblical promise that Torah knowledge is your wisdom and understanding before the nations of the world."

It was signed Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

We tend to flaunt Judaism with the reasonable laws: honoring parents, charity, and all of the basic tenets of moral life. To the outside world, however, we tend not to display the more difficult issues: Kashruth, Shatnez and the like. We are afraid that they are too bold and incomprehensible; surely they cannot designate us as a light unto the nations.

This week, the Torah tells us that there is nothing farther from the truth. It specifically exhorts us that through our Chukim we will be considered as a "light unto the nations." After we have set standards of morality and honesty we earn esteem in the eyes of the world. Then no Torah law or vision will be viewed archaic or inconceivable. We can predict the collapse of the second-most powerful nation on earth in its prime. Foreign relation experts may react with shock and surprise, but deep down they will wait for the prediction to materialize.

The Torah chides us this week that there is nothing in its writings that will embarrass us. Any command, even the most complex and difficult to comprehend, when performed with faith, honesty, and commitment, will cast us as a light unto the nations.

How Powerful We Are

Rabbi Label Lam (Torah.org)

And you shall love HASHEM, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means. (Devarim 6:5)

What does it mean to love HASHEM with all your means? How does one do that? One approach is to employ all of one's resources, whether it is wealth or talent. Another approach offered by Rashi is to love HASHEM with whatever HASHEM measures out, whether it is something perceived as good or even bad. Still, how does one do this?

Reb Tzadok HaKohen writes that when a person does Teshuva, then whatever experience he has had in life can be utilized to serve HASHEM. Not only things that were learned from Holy Books but even odd life encounters can become useful tools to serve HASHEM with love. Please excuse me if I dip into my deep past and draw an example from a less than holy source, but it has helped me enormously and I am still learning from it many years later. It was 1974, Thanksgiving, and my brother bought a couple of tickets for himself, me, and another friend to attend a concert at Madison Square Garden to watch Elton John play. It was exciting and beyond for us American kids who grew up on a heavy diet of modern pop and rock music. We were really enjoying it when something totally unusual and unexpected happened. The star of the night, Mr. John, announced in the middle of the event that he was inviting on stage a good friend and he proceeded to welcome John Lennon.

Now John Lennon was a Beatle and the Beatles had an almost deity-like status among young people all over the world for more than a decade. The place went wild. My brother was hitting me in my ribs with his elbow

Davening Times

Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	7.25pm
Candle Lighting	7.34pm - 7.50pm
Shacharis	7.25am / 9.15am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.17am
Ovos uBonim	5.00-6.00pm
Mincha	2.00pm / 6.00pm / 9.10pm
Motzei Shabbos	10.15pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.05pm

and shouting, "It's a Beatle Bobby, it's a Beatle!" They played one song, a new bouncy tune, "Whatever Gets You Through the Night" and after that something amazing occurred that remains etched in my psyche. They played an old original Beatle song, "She was Just Seventeen...". Madison Square Garden was pulsing "like one man with one heart" as John Lennon with ease plucked the guitar strings and everyone danced and sang along. It was one of the most magical and unifying events I have ever witnessed or been a part of.

Years later I found my way to Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Monsey and there I started to learn how to learn Torah and Daven like a Jew. I remember one Rebbe explaining why we lift our heels when reciting in Kiddusha, "KADOSH-KADOSH-KADOSH" – ("HASHEM is the Master of Legions and the whole world is filled with His glory). He told us that the angelic world which is wildly greater than anything we could ever imagine is responsive to whatever minor moves we make down here to honor HASHEM. At the time that we are reciting Kedusha and subtly raising up our heels, the Heavenly universe is jumping and dancing with an ecstasy that we could never estimate. My mind immediately flashed back to the nearest experience I had ever had to that which the teacher was describing. When I have the presence of mind to remember it has helped me to focus and visualize the grand import of what I am doing during that otherwise banal religious ritual. Yes, I am like that Beatle on the center stage of the universe gently plucking those strings and generating an indescribable pulse of sublime unity. This is lesson number one.

Years later I felt comfortable sharing this experience and insight with smaller and larger audiences. Some told me that I could easily revisit the concert on the computer and so I became curious to see if my memory was matched by the recorded record and there it was exactly as I had remembered. I could not find myself in the audience, but I certainly remember being there and how it felt. The camera is scanning the crowd and there is John Lennon's wife with her lips pursed nervously and rubbing her hands like the mother of the Bar Mitzvah boy in the women's section. It seemed odd to me that she was not enjoying it like everyone else. So, I scrolled to read an article. I was shocked by what I learned there.

He had not played music in public for many years prior to this appearance and it was his last public performance. He was afraid of his shadow, afraid of failing. It hit me with such force. Someone who with a few movements could electrify a room of 20,000 people was scared to try. I realized that we may not realize the importance of the moves we make and how powerful we are.

With Your Own Ears

Rabbi Naftali Reich (Torah.org)

They were a new generation. Some of them had experienced the Exodus as very young children. Most had been born during the forty years of confinement in the Desert. Now, as they stood on the threshold of the Promised Land, the older generation had all died. The future belonged to the young and innocent. And sadly, Moses would not be there to share it with them.

As Moses prepared to bid them farewell, he spoke to them words that would fortify their faith and leave them with an enduring sense of inspiration. To this end, he recalled the gathering of the people at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. "Investigate the records of the past," he declared. "Has there ever happened such a great thing, or was anything similar ever reported, that a nation should hear the Lord's voice speaking from the fire, as you have heard, and survive?"

The commentators are puzzled. Why does Moses refer to the revelation at Sinai "as you have heard" when in fact it was their parents who had heard, not them? This was a new generation most of whom had not even been born at the time.

The answer lies in a phenomenon known as national memory. Let us take American history as an example. How do we know there was a Civil War? After all, this war took place over a century ago, and no one alive today has a personal recollection of it. So how do we know that it actually took place? Is it because documentary evidence proves that it happened? Of course not. There is a much more fundamental reason. Anything that happens in full public view and is experienced by the entire nation automatically becomes part of our national memory. Even after the individuals who lived at the time pass on, the experience lives on in the national consciousness from generation to generation. We know the Civil War took place because America, collectively, remembers it.

Throughout the ages, people have come forward and claimed divine revelations. For one reason or another, their claims may have seemed credible to some of the people of their times, thereby gaining them a following. But as generation follows generation, the credibility of such claims fades. Why should people accept the word of self-proclaimed prophets whom they have never seen with their own eyes? Why should

they make the leap of faith?

Not so with the revelation at Sinai, Moses was telling the Jewish people. Belief in the divine origin of the Torah requires no especial leap of faith. It was given in full view of millions of people, and as such, it was indelibly inscribed in the national memory. Each of you, as individuals, may not have been there, but it is firmly rooted in your national memory. It is as if you have seen it with your own eyes and heard it with your own ears.

A king died unexpectedly, leaving behind two sons. The older son was a somewhat lackluster, lackadaisical character, while the younger son was bright, articulate and ambitious.

Not surprisingly, the royal succession came into question. Some believed that by rights of primogeniture the throne should go to the older son. Others insisted that the welfare of the kingdom would be better served with the younger son on the throne.

A special meeting of the Council of Ministers was convened to debate the question of the succession, and both princes were invited to air their views.

"Gentlemen," said the younger prince, "I have some very important news for you. The problem of the succession has been solved. My father appeared to me in a dream last night and told me in no uncertain terms that he wants me to succeed him as king."

"If I may be so bold, your highness," one elderly minister replied, "It seems to me that nothing has been solved. If your father really wanted you to be king, he should have come to us in our dreams, not to you in yours."

In our own lives, living in a global multi-cultural society, we are surrounded by myriad religious and ideological messages that are at odds with the fundamental tenets of Judaism, and it would not be surprising if at times we entertained some doubts and anxiety concerning our faith. At such times, we should recall the words of Moses that speak of the revelation at Sinai "as you have heard." Each of us has indeed heard it, because it is imbedded in our national memory. For thousands of years, Jewish people have willingly sacrifice their lives for the Torah because we have all "heard" Hashem's voice speaking to us at Mount Sinai as vividly and distinctly as if we had been standing there in the flesh when it took place.

Facing the Challenge

Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig (Torah.org)

"G-d our L-rd sealed a covenant with us at Chorev. Not with our forefathers alone did G-d seal this covenant, but with us, we who are here today, all of us alive. Face to face G-d spoke to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire." (Devarim 5:2-4) Moshe then repeated the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments that G-d uttered as the central event of the Revelation at Sinai when the Children of Israel accepted G-d's Torah to create a timeless covenant. Sifri (Tannaitic halachic medrash to the Books of Bamidbar and Devarim) discusses G-d's initial offer of the Torah to the nations of the world. Understandably, they wanted to know what it contained. To one nation He told the ban on murder, to another the prohibition of adultery. When they heard of these restrictions they had no interest in accepting the Torah. They refused the offer.

In Beraishis/Genesis, centuries before the Torah was given, G-d spelled out the Seven Noahide Laws that all of mankind is obligated to follow. These seven include the prohibitions of adulterous relationships and homicide. Why, then, did G-d, when offering the nations of the world the Torah, describe the Torah using mitzvos they were already commanded to follow? More so, why would the nations of the world forego the opportunity to become G-d's chosen people simply because the Torah contained commandments they were already obligated to observe?

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr (Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath in New York; 1910-1979; acknowledged as one of the first American trained gedolim, he authored Ohr Gedalyahu on the Torah and festivals) explains the fundamental difference between the Decalogue and the Seven Noahide Laws. Rashi (Shemos/22:12) clarifies that all 613 of the Torah's mitzvos are alluded to in the Ten Commandments. Each one of the ten has numerous lessons and obligations extending from it, guidelines for the countless intricate details of life. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that an extension of the ban on murder is a prohibition of embarrassing another person; such an act is tantamount to killing the person. But the original Noahide restrictions were not nearly so broad and imposing. One could readily go through life, maintaining the guidelines of the command with no requisite character refinement. The Torah was given to people to enable them to realize their spiritual potential. This accomplishment necessitates attention not only to the big picture but on all of the small details as well.

This is what G-d was telling the other nations when he offered them the Torah; this is the level of responsibility they rebuffed. But the Jewish nation answered "we shall do and we shall listen." We accept the challenge, we will grow from the challenge.