



Ohr Yerushalayim News

28th November 2015 - Volume 8 - Issue 20 – וישלח – ט"ז כסלו תשע"ו

News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Mr and Mrs Simcha Shadmi on the engagement of Ari to Chavi Bude from London.
Mazel Tov to Dr and Mrs Michael Wilks on the wedding this week of their grandson.

Save The Date

Save the date for the Chanuka fun afternoon on Sunday 13th December until Mincha followed by Menorah lighting with guest speaker.

Thumbs Up For Thumbs

Dani Epstein

Thumbs are not, in the grand scheme of things, very exciting appendages. No-one runs around yelling "Hey, look at this, I have a thumb! Oh you have two, cool!" As digits go, thumbs are simply there, they work, we don't think about them at all and we expect to wake up every day with our thumbs firmly attached.

Well, last week I was struggling to remove a recalcitrant piece of plastic from the glass bed of my 3D printer, employing in the process one of my more sophisticated tools which is essentially a stanley knife blade embedded into a scraper handle I had downloaded and printed from thingiverse. I have used that tool on many an occasion and praised it's utility, and the amazing fact that someone thousands of miles away had designed this useful device which I subsequently printed in the comfort of my own home.

In this case, my struggle with the resisting plastic resulted in the blade slipping, whipping across the glass and slicing deeply into my thumb. Naturally Hatzolo was called, our dear and ever-patient neighbour Yehudah Issler turned up with his bag of tricks in less than two minutes (that in itself deserves a great deal of consideration – two minutes for an emergency response!) and after having patched me up I was despatched to hospital.

Anyone who is aware of my squeamishness will empathise with my reaction during treatment, which involved multiple injections and several stitches. Of course I fainted. What else do you expect from me? It took an hour for the doctor to reassemble all the bits, and credit to her she continued working even while I was out – no panic ensued.

When I came home battered and bruised, all that crossed my mind was was the fact I survived generally intact. No irreversible damage had been caused, the nerve had not been severed and the treatment did not induce a full-blown heart attack. All in all, it wasn't so bad.

Until I tried to unzip my jumper. All of a sudden, I hit a brick wall. The anaesthetic had bruised my thumb pretty badly, and I simply could not use it at all, despite the fact that most of the digit was still numb. As the day wore on, the realisation dawned that my thumb was

totally out of commission. Worse yet, once the anaesthetic had worn off, every slight movement became an "issue". My thumb would not bend, using a keyboard became painful even if I simply brushed my appendage across a key without depressing it and I was forced to concede that for the next few days I would be one thumb down.

Well, that should hardly be a show-stopper, I thought. A bit of creative thinking, and all will be well.

It simply highlights how we fail to appreciate the vital role this seemingly uninteresting part of our anatomy plays. Try opening a plastic food packet without using one of your thumbs; you can use either your left or right one, but not both. It becomes a very fascinating challenge. Zips go from being a no-brainer to requiring a great deal of dexterity and parallel-thinking – my wife had to close my coat for me at one point. Making a coffee becomes a 180 degree effort, using the opposite hands than the usual. I tried tying my shoelaces without employing my injured thumb, and it took several goes before I finally got a knot that eventually opened ten minutes later. I can't close the cuff-buttons of my shirts, so I simply roll them up.

The list continues, but the point is quite simply this: I never imagined what an enormous difference having an opposable thumb makes to almost every waking moment I have. If you are sufficiently bored one day, I encourage you to undertake five common tasks without using one of your thumbs. It is such an eye-opener. Who would have ever thought that one digit can make such a pivotal difference to one's life?

In reality, we should start the day by simply considering the value of every part of one's body. Consider toes. One reads about climbers or Arctic explorers losing a toe or two to frostbite, but

The Week Ahead

פרשת וישלח	
Candle Lighting	3.42pm
Mincha	3.47pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.56am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Shiur	3.03pm
2nd Mincha	3.33pm
סעודה שלישית	following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	4.53pm
Ovos uBonim	6.08pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	3.40pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

who ponders the impact of this loss on their lives? Just how important are toes?

Well, Hooshang Hemami, professor of electrical and computer engineering at Ohio State University, published a paper in the Journal of Biomechanics arguing that, among other things, toes are rather important not just for humans, but for robots too. He and his team developed a complex model for studying the foot in various situations, and concluded that toes were pretty useful. "Now that we have a reasonable computer model, we hope to explore, in the future, the sensory apparatus and other functions of the toes in diverse human activities," he concluded.

Now who would have thought that toes are so interesting?

So if we can suppose that a human exists who can take the time to consider and appreciate the value of everything that surrounds him, toes and thumbs included, then we can appreciate why the Torah considers the incident with Yaakov's small bottles so pivotal that it had to be recorded for posterity.

On the face of it, in our disposable throw-away society, a plastic bottle is hardly worth a mention. How many people stop to consider the complexity of the engineering required to produce the humble 500ml plastic water bottle? The material science that goes into developing plastics that can be paper-thin yet rigid and strong enough to function as a pressurized container, and can be recycled almost infinitely? Should we stop to consider these things?

Buried amongst all the complex elements of the battle across the river lies the thought: consider even the simplest things around us. At first glance, this is a simplistic message, and the sort of thing the Deformed Judaism does really well. Take a complex story, pull out a simplistic message and ignore 99.99999% recurring of the rest of the incident. Yay!

Nonetheless, if we simply sailed past this point, we would be in remiss. The Torah does not contain any "green" legislation. That's because it does not have a classification for criminal law, civil law or women's rights either. The Torah is one seamless body of law, a giant maelstrom of wildly complex rules and regulations all interconnected through myriad paths. There is no categorical or taxonomic difference in Halochah between Chillul Shabbos and oino'oh, for example. Or Tefillin and eating matzoh.

Sure, the Talmud does attempt to organise Halochah by categorizing the various masechtos, but anyone who has learned more than a few dafim knows what a miserable failure that was, since twenty lines into any standard-length omud someone is bound to jump right off-topic in order to refute the opposition or support their position with some very abstruse proof of a seemingly unconnected subject. I have not learned the whole of shas, but so far I have not come across a daf in which anyone manages to wrestle one halochah to the ground without nipping out somewhere else in the process.

So why is it like this? Why can't we have a neatly organised system, with major groupings and classes of law?

The incident with Yaakov's bottles is one facet of the answer: it is because we have to treat every part of the Torah's laws, philosophy and morals with equal weight. We cannot argue that mitzvah x is greater than mitzvah y. Of course we do have rules of prioritisation, this is quite true, but these rules are imposed by the Torah, and are themselves part of the Halachic body of law. From our perspective, these rules do not evaluate the relative merits of one mitzvah versus another, but simply give us a "stacking order" for prioritising their execution.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Yaakov is held in high

regard for wanting to retrieve his missing jars. The consideration was based on various factors. Firstly, all the immediate priorities had been dealt with. Now the question was: are those jars worth returning for? Is the river crossing too dangerous, or does danger lie on the other side of the bank? Will the time required to retrieve the jars be justifiable?

Within this lies a world of moral and ethical gems. Firstly, as Rashi notes, the righteous have such a close regard and consideration for everything they possess that even the apparently mundane and unimportant can be elevated simply by dint of raising their value in the observer's eye. One can barely imagine what Yaakov's reaction might be when observing someone throwing a perfectly usable plastic bottle into the bin, to be consigned to a landfill and never reused in any way.

This requires some thoughtful and much broader evaluation of the bottle beyond its pecuniary value, and the ease of its replacement. One has to morally justify its disposal and the impact of that disposal as well. In order to continuously appraise one's environment and our impact upon it, we require a motivation, an impetus to do so and successfully operate within such a frame of mind.

To achieve that, one can become a tree-hugger and only wear cable knit jumpers and green wellies.

For someone at the spiritual level of Yaakov, however, that continuous degree of consideration came about from the self-refinement of his character, his relationship with Hashem and the gratitude he had for the bounty he had received. Therefore, despite his great wealth, even a humble flask was precious to him, since it – just like the rest of his wealth – was also a gift from Hashem and therefore had an intrinsic value that transcended its mere cost.

This is a moral consideration. Perhaps an ethical one as well. The most important issue is, though, that the motivation or driving force behind this decision was not humanistic, green or some other ephemeral catalyst, which will no doubt change from generation to generation depending on the sway hedonism holds over environmental conservation. We can project Yaakov's decision onto our dilemmas with waste, knowing that the impetus itself will not evolve into something else next year.

Above all, pausing to think about where that bottle will end up before throwing it out should be given a simple consideration, one that sat at the forefront of every decision Yaakov took, and that we ought to strive for: what does Hashem actually want me to do right now?

Finally, an important disclaimer: No thumbs were hurt during the production of this article.

Hilchos Shabbos

Melocho: Ma'amer (Gathering)

Ma'amer refers to the Malocho of gathering the produce for use in the Mishkan.

Practical Shailo:

If one drops a box of fruit in the kitchen and the fruit scatters, can one collect the fruit?

Answer:

Yes, the prohibition of gathering scattered fruit does not apply if they are scattered indoors.