

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Opportunity Knocks

RABBI DOVID HEINEMANN
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR


THE GEMARA IN SOTAH (13A) TELLS US AN INTERESTING STORY ABOUT YAAKOV AVINU'S BURIAL IN THIS WEEK'S PARASHA.

When Yosef and his brothers were on the way to bury Yaakov, Esav stopped them and said that he should be buried in the *Maaras Hamachpailah* and not Yaakov. The *shevatim* responded that Esav had sold his spot to Yaakov. Esav countered that although he had sold his first-born rights, he had not sold his spot in the cave and requested that they show him the contract. The contract was in Mitzrayim, and they sent Naftoli, who was swift like a deer, to go back and get it. One of the grandchildren taking part in the funeral was Chushim. He was Dan's only son and he was deaf. He did not understand what the holdup was. He asked about the delay, and those around him explained to him the whole sequence of events that had taken place with Esav. Once Chushim understood what was happening, he exclaimed "Until Naftoli gets back from Mitzrayim my grandfather should lay in disgrace!?" He got up, took out a sword, and chopped off Esav's head.

There is a seemingly obvious question here. What brought Chushim to stand up for his grandfather's honor more than everyone else? He had many illustrious uncles and

cousins, and they didn't jump up to chop off Esav's head. In addition, why did the Gemara feel it necessary to tell us that Chushim was deaf? Why is that important to the story?

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz answers these questions with a beautiful insight into the human character. All the children and grandchildren of Yaakov that had come for the funeral heard Esav's complaint. They started negotiating back and forth with him whether or not he had any right for the spot in the *Maaras Hamachpailah*. As these negotiations were taking place, they were getting used to the fact that Yaakov's burial was being held up. They were being desensitized to their grandfather laying there in disgrace. Chushim, on the other hand, was deaf and was not privy to the discussion. When he heard the whole story suddenly, he immediately burned with anger over the disgrace and delay in his Zaydie's burial.

The human condition is such that we get used to the situations we are in, often very quickly. We can get used to very difficult or bad conditions. When people get inspired, they should act immediately and try to accept upon themselves something to help them grow. If they wait, they will get used to the present condition and stay stagnant. For example, if someone starts a new *chavrusah*, he should grab the opportunity to grow and be careful not to waste any of the time. Otherwise, he will quickly get used to that time wasting and the *Yetzer Hora* will continue to drag him down. If he is vigilant in his fight, Hashem will give him *siyata dishmaya* (heavenly assistance). 

A HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

This week's *parasha* discusses the end of Yaakov Avinu's life and the preparations that he made for after his passing, for example, blessing his children, his place of burial etc.

Some people wonder when confronted with the idea of "creating their own legacy" and committing a portion of their savings or estate to *tzedakah*, "Is it right for me to gift away a percentage of my estate which will decrease the amount left for my children"?

On this topic a fascinating Gemara comes to mind:

The Gemara in *Kesubos* (67b) teaches us that before Mar Ukva died, he asked that his charity accounts be brought to him. He saw that he had given 7000 dinars. "I am about to embark upon a long journey [in the eternal Afterlife], but the provisions I have set aside [charitable deeds] are insufficient!" Stirred by this thought, Mar Ukva proceeded to give away half of his assets to charity.


The Talmud goes on to explain that even though our sages set certain restrictions in regard to how much *tzedakah* one is allowed to give away, this only applies during a person's lifetime, but not at the time of his death.

This *halacha* is codified in the *Rema* (Y.D. 249:1)

The *Aruch haShulchan* (Y.D. 249:1) explains that giving half of one's assets at the time of death is equivalent to splitting one's estate between himself and his heirs: half of one's wealth is designated for the benefit of one's soul and the second half is reserved for his heirs.

— CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE —>

A RIDDLE FOR YOU

How would it be possible to go through an entire Jewish calendar year without reading one of the *parshiyos*? 

See reverse side for the answer

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GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

RABBI PAYSACH KROHN RELATES A PERSONAL STORY that occurred after the passing of his father when he was a twenty-one-year-old man. A man from his neighborhood, Mr. Spiegel, stopped him one day upon leaving *davening*. Mr. Spiegel handed Rabbi Krohn an envelope saying, "I know that your family is having a hard time making ends meet, here is something to help." "I appreciate your concern, Mr. Spiegel, but we are managing." "It's not charity, it's a loan. You'll pay it back whenever you'd like," answered Mr. Spiegel. "If that's the case I'll ask my mother if she would like the loan, I cannot accept without her permission." Rabbi Krohn brought his mother the money and after she was told it was a loan and not charity, she accepted. Two years passed until the Krohns felt ready to pay back the money to Mr. Spiegel. When Rabbi Krohn tried to give Mr. Spiegel an envelope with money in it, he refused to take it. "You said the money was a loan!" "I did," said Mr. Spiegel, "and it is." "But let me explain. My business at one point was faltering, and another person gave me an envelope with money which I was not ready to take. The person assured me it was a loan payable whenever I want, not charity. I accepted and after I was back on my feet, I tried to pay him back and he refused to take the money. He told me that the way to pay back the loan was by finding someone else in need and passing the money on to that person. I tell you the same thing. It's a loan, but the way to pay back the loan is for you to find another person in need, and pass it on to that person." And so they did! 🕯

RIDDLE ANSWER

It is possible if one year the Parsha of
 Vayelech is read before Rosh Hashana and
 the next year it is not read until after Rosh
 Hashana. 🕯

A HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

CONTINUED

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe*, C.M. vol. 2, 50) endorses this concept of giving *tzedaka* lavishly before he leaves this world "If a person fears that he will suffer from *gehinom* for his sins, *tzedaka* will certainly protect him. And even if *gehinom* is not one's concern, he would be doing a great eternal service to his soul by giving charity in order to increase his merits in the Afterlife"

Therefore, one is not only allowed, but encouraged, to worry about his eternal life and make a commitment while still alive, thereby continuing to earn "brownie points" even after leaving this world.

As far as how to prioritize *tzedaka*, my Rosh Yeshivah, Hagaon R' Dovid Soloveitchik, *Shlita*, says in the name of his grandfather, Rav Chaim Brisker, that since the paramount obligation to study and support Torah is constant and

applies immediately, one should rather contribute to support Torah than to even build a new hospital (since the hospital will take time to construct and will therefore only save lives of those who will be sick and in danger in the future).

Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe*, Y.D. vol. 3, 94) rules that when faced with a choice as to which Torah institution to donate to, "The primary concern of the Jewish people is to produce outstanding Torah sages who can transmit the Torah's teachings to others and issue authoritative *halachic* decisions. Without such unique individuals our people cannot survive because out Torah tradition will be lost."

If you would like to include the Kollel in the plans for your estate, please speak to a member of the Kollel's leadership to create and secure your eternal legacy! 🕯



Time off = time to learn!



BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

A problem that plagued American Jewry into the 20th century was entrusting rabbinical duties to other synagogue officials, such as the cantors, who were often unqualified for these duties. One example was cantors officiating at weddings. Stories abound of mistakes that were made. Some weddings skipped the giving of the ring, or marriages were made between those who were forbidden to marry (even adulterous). When Rabbi Eliezer Silver was rabbi of the community of Springfield, MA, clergy membership was already a state requirement in order to officiate at a religious marriage ceremony. Rabbi Silver began to petition the Massachusetts legislature to exclude cantors from the classification of "rabbi" by asking for proof of ordination, as was required for other faiths. As part of his effort, Rabbi Silver wrote a seventeen-page memorandum explaining what it meant to be ordained as a rabbi, as well as what a cantor's role in the synagogue was, and why, therefore, they should not automatically be seen as qualified to assume a rabbi's role. 🕯

SOURCE: Rakeffet-Rothkoff, Aaron. *The Silver Era*, Feldheim Publishers, pp. 75-76, 1981.

Cincinnati Community Kollel

2241 Losantiville Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45237 • 513-631-1118 • kollel@shul.net • cincykollel.org

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