

A PARASHA THOUGHT

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

At the beginning of this week's *parasha* we find Moshe *Rabbeinu* imploring the Jewish people to follow the word of Hashem. Moshe then commands the Jewish people to neither add to nor subtract from the *mitzvos*. Then, however, Moshe references something which happened earlier, at the end of *parshas* Balak. There we are told of the plague that struck the Jews following the debacle of Jewish men sinning with Midianite women and serving the idol known as *Baal-Peor*. What was Moshe's intent by juxtaposing these two prohibitions? What similarity is there between adding to or subtracting from the Torah and idol worship? Amongst the answers given to this question is an approach suggested by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. Idolatry, the Rambam tells us (*Hilchos Avoda Zarah* 1:1), began as a mistake. People thought that since Hashem created the sun and the moon and the stars, and they serve such important functions, Hashem would want us to honor them, just as a king would want us to honor him by respecting his servants. However, with the passage of time, people were misled until they began worshiping the stars themselves, not as a way of serving G-d, but as independent powers. This, writes Rav Moshe, is the connection between *avoda zarah* and adding to or subtracting from the Torah. Idolatry is the model for what happens when people begin tampering with the Torah. Even with good intentions, any change from the word of G-d ends in tragedy. Another answer to our question is given by Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz (*maamar* 78 and 84). *Baal-Peor* was a particularly bizarre and abhorrent *avoda zarah* in that it was worshipped by defecating before the idol. What was the attraction to such a revolting form of worship? The answer, writes Rav Shmulevitz, is that *Baal-Peor* represents a complete lack of boundaries. Everything is free and uncontrolled. Nothing is sacred, to the extent that even a religious ritual devolves into obscenity. This connects to the prohibition of adding to or subtracting from the *mitzvos*. The Torah lists positive commandments and prohibitions. We follow them because they are the word of G-d. When people add to or subtract from the Torah, they are demonstrating that even

what they do observe has nothing to do with Hashem. Judaism becomes not what does G-d want from us, but rather what religious practices can we perform to provide us with good feelings. Service of G-d is transformed into self-worship. Essentially, a new religion is created – a religion of doing whatever we want. This is the connection between *Baal-Peor* and adding to or subtracting from the Torah. Both are about an absolute lack of boundaries. The extreme example of this is *Baal-Peor*. A more subtle example of this is exchanging G-d's expectations of us for a self-serving replacement religion. In short, we are saying that there are two similarities between *Baal-Peor* and the prohibition of adding to or subtracting from the *mitzvos*. One that any departure from the Torah, even well intentioned, ends in tragedy. The other is that there is an inherent urge to throw off all restrictions and act in a completely unrestrained manner. Both ideas are relevant to today's world.

Secular concepts of morality are shifting with startling speed. All boundaries are suddenly blurred, as even biological realities are viewed as flexible and transient. Behavior which only several years ago would be viewed as tragically disturbed and unhealthy is now both encouraged and celebrated. In an attempt to conserve Judaism, or in an attempt to open orthodoxy to a broader audience, some might be tempted to reform the word of G-d to accommodate contemporary concepts of morality. However, this approach is doomed to failure. The Torah was written for all generations, all countries, and all cultures. What was true in ancient Greece and medieval France and pre-war Poland holds true today as well. True, we can differentiate between people and their behavior. We can accept human beings as human beings, while simultaneously rejecting the lifestyles they have been influenced to follow. But any attempt to use the Torah to justify the malaise currently gripping society is wrong. Current concepts of morality are transient. But the Torah is eternal.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Shabbos! 🌟

LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPAT)

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Near the end of the *parasha* Moshe exhorts the people "to do that which is fair and good in the eyes of Hashem" (*Devarim* 6:18). Rashi explains that this means to compromise and to go beyond the letter of the law. Among the many areas where "going beyond the letter of the law" might apply is the question of competition and infringement.

According to the Gemara in *Baba Basra* (21b), a person is limited in opening a business or venture when it competes with an already existing business of the same type and quality. Doing so could be a violation of the Torah prohibition against theft. A non-local person could only open such a business if there so much demand that he will not be taking away any profits from the pre-existing ones. A local person, on the other hand, has more license. He may open a competing venture even if it will take away some of the profit from the pre-existing establishments. He is only limited in that he can't cause an existing business to close completely or force it to abandon a particular line of business.

However, it is a *midas chasidus*, an act of piety – going beyond the letter of the law – for the local person to be more sensitive to the pre-existing businesses and to also avoid taking even some of their profits from them and, instead, to compete only when there is truly enough business for everyone. Even if

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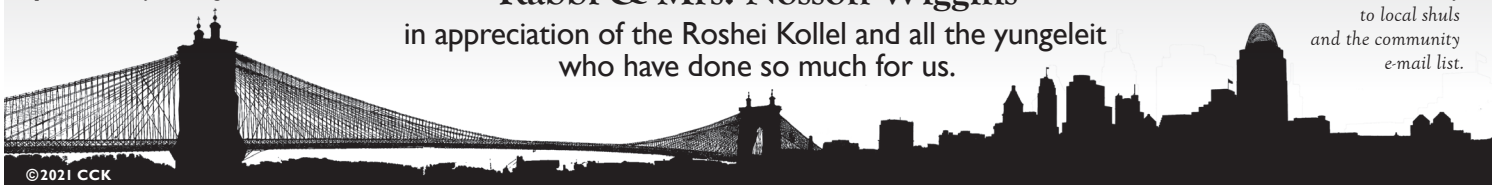
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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPHAT)

CONTINUED

he will now force the prior business to work harder and make more effort to retain its profit level, he will still satisfy this higher level of fairness.

Living at this higher level is really expressing one's faith in Hashem and that one's livelihood is in His hands. We are obligated to make our effort, but only as far as is permitted and fair in Hashem's eyes. As Moshe concludes his words on this matter, "so that it will be good for you." 🕊️

A SHINING EXAMPLE

The Goldberger family lived in the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem. Every summer they would go on an annual vacation with their 6 children up to the northern part of Israel. Being a large family on a tight budget they would try to make the trip as cost effective as possible. One of the conditions was that there would be absolutely no eating in restaurants and all meals would be prepared by their mother. As they were traveling up north, they stopped in Netanya by the ocean to eat a picnic lunch. As the family finished up eating and playing by the water, 8-year-old Zevi turned to his father and said, "Ta, I need the bathroom." Moshe, their father, looked around and the only place he saw around was an upscale kosher restaurant. Knowing that they don't like people coming to just use the bathroom, but having no choice, he took his son Zevi there. When they got to the restaurant there was a waitress at the door. Moshe told the waitress, "I'm really sorry. I am not planning to buy anything, but my son really needs the restroom. Can we

possibly come in and use it quickly?" The waitress looked around the restaurant and said, "Okay, but make it quick." They went to the restroom and as they were on their way back the head waiter, Rafi, saw them and blew up, screaming at them, "You religious are all the same! You are just coming to use our bathroom and not buy anything! Who even gave you permission to come in here?" Moshe looked at the waitress at the door and saw her go white and realized that if he says it was her, she just might be out of a job. He made a split-second decision and turned to Rafi. "I am sorry that you got the situation all wrong. I'm about to bring my whole family in to eat dinner. Do you have room for a table of eight?" Stunned, Rafi apologized and quickly put some tables together to seat them. The whole family trooped in and ordered one item each. As the family was finishing their "meal," suddenly, out of the kitchen walked a procession of waiters carrying fancy desserts with sparklers. Mr. Goldberger looked at the first waiter and said incredulously, "We did not order this!?" The words were hardly out of his mouth before the owner of the restaurant himself walked over to the table. "As soon as you sat down, the waitress at the door came in to my office crying. 'A whole family just ordered a whole meal just to not embarrass me,' she told me. 'Nobody in my life has done that for me.' This is all on us," he concluded. When the bill arrived, Mr. Goldberger saw that the bill was ₪0 with a note attached. "Whenever you come back it's 50% off," it read. Moshe went to again find the owner and asked, "what about my bill for this time?" "In this restaurant," he replied, "we have a policy that we only charge humans, not angels." How far we go not to embarrass another - it's what Jews do. 🕊️

TEFILLA TIDBITS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

This week is known as Shabbos *Nachamu*. The name comes from the opening words of the Haftarah "*Nachamu Nachamu Ami*" (be consoled be consoled my nation). Yeshaya tells the Jewish people to be consoled over the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash* because it will ultimately be rebuilt. The *meforshim* (commentaries) are bothered about how can we be consoled if what we want is not here yet. Rav Dessler in the *Michtav Meliyhu* explained that the purpose of the mourning for the *Bais Hamikdash* is not to make us depressed; rather, it is for us to lose our faith in this transitory world and realize that the true good is only in the world to come. If we attain that over the weeks of mourning for the *Bais Hamikdash* we have achieved the true purpose of this period, and we are now on the path of *teshuvah* (repentance). The *nechama* (comfort) is not that we have the *Bais Hamikdash*, but that we have taken the proper steps to ensure that we are on the path to the third and final *Bais Hamikdash*. 🕊️



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