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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

16 Adar 5768 / Feb. 22, 2008

Parshas Ki Sissa  Rabbi Pesach Gottesman

Lasting Growth

In this week's parsha, Parshas Ki Sisa, we learn how Bnei Yisrael sinned by serving the Egel Hazahav- the golden calf. Rashi (32:4) understands from the pesukim that it was the Eruv Rav, the people from other nations who "tagged along" with the Yidden leaving Mitzrayim, who instigated building an Egel, causing the rest of Klal Yisrael to sin.

Harav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l questions how a nation that just crossed the Yam Suf- where Chazal teach us that even a simple maidservant saw a greater revelation of the shechina than the greatest of Nevi'im- could fall so low a short time later. No doubt the Eruv Rav, too, had been privileged to that revelation!

R' Chaim develops an important idea from this. Although a person may experience a great and deep revelation, he won't automatically be a changed person. The maidservant and the Eruv Rav **saw** something great, yet they remained the same. The Nevi'im, on the other hand, had to prepare themselves and exert themselves in order to reach the state of being a Navi, climbing from one spiritual level to the next. For them, nevu'ah was indeed a very high level to raise **themselves** to be worthy of seeing a revelation. They changed their entire being in order to receive nevu'ah.

Citing other examples from Chazal, R' Chaim shows how people could experience tremendous levels of nevuah and remain their same small selves. Bilaam was on the same madreiga of nevuah as Moshe Rabbinu, yet since he never had to work to reach it, he never changed from the experience. The Gemara in Megilla Daf 6 states, "Lo yagato u'matzasa' al ta'amin". Don't believe one who claims to have succeeded without exerting any effort. Even if it

seems that one has achieved something, if it was accomplished without "yegiah" (toil), it isn't a personal, permanent achievement that he has acquired.

A bochur once asked Hagoan R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlita for a bracha to remember all he had learnt. R' Chaim responded, "If you learn with hasmadoh- diligence, then you will remember". The Gaon would not give a brocha- a "quick fix"- for success in Torah, only through diligence would a person grow and achieve.

Every Erev Pesach, R' Chaim makes a siyum on the entire Talmud- Bavli and Yerushalmi. One year the famous maggid Harav Yaakov Galinsky shlita approached R' Chaim and told him, "My brochos are more effective than yours- every year I give you a brocha to finish "kol hatorah kulo" again and you wish the same to me. Look whose bracha is fulfilled yearly!" To that R' Chaim Kanievsky answered, "What bracha? Only through my hard work did I finish again". The Gaon's attitude is that Torah can't be acquired without yegiah.

Along the same lines, Harav Shlomo Wolbe zt"l encourages students who claim to have a difficult time in understanding their learning not to despair. "Only **you**", says Rav Wolbe, "who has to work doubly as hard to understand, is privileged to savor the feeling of growth when you succeed."

These days when, Boruch Hashem, Torah is available at all levels at the push of a button (and click of a mouse). Yet we must not forget that true growth (and lasting change) comes only through exerting one's self.

Rabbi Gottesman learns full-time at the kollel.

HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Zecher Lechurban

Rabbi Akiva Niehaus

We are in midst of learning through the *parshiyos* that deal with the construction of the *Mishkan*, the dwelling place for the *shechina*. The great *mussar* teachers write that every Jew has an obligation to make his home into a miniature *Mishkan*, a place where *Hashem* can dwell. Aside from ensuring that the home is filled with holiness and purity, a person must also be careful to fulfill every applicable *halacha* related to a home. Let us discuss one such *halacha* that perhaps is not so well known.

After the destruction of the *Bais Hamkdash*, the *chachomim* instituted many decrees so that people will constantly be reminded of the *churban*. One decree was that when one builds a house and paints it, he must leave an area opposite the door without lime, thus leaving the plaster exposed (*S.A. O.C. 560:1*). This exposed area is referred to as the “*zecher lechurban*”.

Who is responsible to leave a *zecher lechurban*?

One who builds a new house must arrange with the painter to leave part of the wall unpainted. If one purchased a house already painted, and there is no *zecher lechurban*, the following conditions apply:

- a) If the buyer is unaware that the house was ever painted by a Jewish owner, he can leave the house as is, for he can assume that the painting was done by a gentile owner. When he subsequently paints the house, he must leave a *zecher lechurban* (*Shu"t Arugas Habosem O.C.179*). It is unnecessary to peel off the paint in that area, rather he can paint around the area leaving it exposed (Harav Dovid Zucker shlita).
- b) If, however, the house was definitely painted by a Jewish owner and he did not leave a *zecher lechurban*, the new owner must peel off the paint in the required area (*M.B. 560:4*).

A renter should certainly not peel off paint without permission (*Orchos Rabbeinu 2* page 148), but if he repaints the house he should leave a *zecher lechurban* (*P.M.G. A.A. s.k. 4*). Some say, however, that the original decree to make a *zecher lechurban* only applies to the owner of a house and not to a tenant (*IG"m O.C. 3:86*). One who paints their house in order to sell or rent it does not need to leave a *zecher lechurban* (*IG"m ibid.*).

What is the correct size and location for the *zecher lechurban*?

The *zecher lechurban* should be a square, amah by amah, which is a square whose side is 18.9" according to Harav Chaim Noeh, 22.7" according to the *Chazon Ish* and 21.25" according to the *Igros Moshe*. Ideally, the empty spot should be a square and not a rectangle (*P.M.G. ibid.*). Some have the custom to leave an open square in every room (*Orchos Rabbeinu 2* page 146), but common custom is to leave one square in the front entranceway of the house (*Yaavetz* quoted in *S.T. s.k. 1*). The ideal location is on the wall directly opposite the door so that one sees it immediately upon entering the house (*S.A. ibid.*). If this is not possible, one should leave the open square as close as is possible to the

wall opposite the door (*Mor Ukitzza*). Another option is to leave an open space on the wall directly opposite the door in a rectangular shape containing the proper area (Harav Shmuel Fuerst shlita in the name of Hagoan R' Moshe Feinstein zt"l). An alternative option is to leave the open space directly above the front door (*M.B. s.k. 3*).

How should it look?

The open area should be left bare without paint and it should not be painted black (*M.B. s.k. 3*). Some, however, did have a custom to paint the area black (see *Aruch Hashulchan s.k. 5* and *IG"m O.C. 3:86*), but it is preferable to write “*zecher lechurban*” on the black area (see *Shaar Hatziyun s.k. 8*). If the walls of the room are covered with wallpaper, an open area should be left without wallpaper (*A.H. s.k. 5*). One who draws a picture on the wall to remind him of the *churban*, e.g. a picture of the *kosel*, has not fulfilled his obligation (*P.M.G. M.Z. s.k. 1*). Although the *zecher lechurban* should remain visible, if one finds it necessary to block the area with a moveable item, e.g. a curtain or bookcase, it is permitted to do so (see *Orchos Rabeinu 2* pg. 147 and *Sefer Habayis perek 19* footnote 7).

Does this *halacha* apply in our times?

A quick survey of many homeowners shows that although many people fulfill this *halacha*, the majority of people unfortunately do not have a *zecher lechurban* in their homes. The *Shaarei Teshuva* (*s.k. 1*) greatly bemoans this fact and says that there is no support to disregard this *halacha*. Many *poskim* attempt to justify the lenient attitude. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*s.k. 4*) says that in his times it was popular to mix a large amount of sand into the lime. This caused the lime to be less bright and the *chachomim* did not decree to leave a *zecher lechurban* with such lime. Obviously this does not apply in modern times when paint does not contain sand. The *Mishne Brurah* (*s.k. 2*) suggests that the decree may refer only to a specific lime which is extremely bright, but says in the name of the *Chayei Adam* that this is in not a valid explanation and he has no idea why people are lenient. The *Daas Torah* says that since we live amongst gentiles, we can be lenient in order to avoid their derision. Similarly, the *Orchos Chaim* says that municipalities insist that all houses be aesthetic. However, these explanations certainly do not apply nowadays where no one has jurisdiction over what takes place inside one's house (*Shu"t Az Nidberu 7:63*). One final justification is given by Harav Shimon Sofer (*Shu"t Hisorerus Teshuva 3:363*). He says that the original decree was referring to the kind of paint used in their times, which was thick lime. Modern day paint, however, is merely liquid, the same color of lime and does not require a *zecher lechurban*. Other *poskim* make no such distinction, and they feel that even modern day paint requires a *zecher lechurban*. In summary, the consensus of most *poskim* is that every home requires a *zecher lechurban*, and no clear justification can be given to disregard this *halacha* (as heard from Harav D. Zucker shlita and Harav S. Fuerst shlita).

Let us conclude with the words of Harav Chaim Palagi (brought in *Kaf Hachaim s.k. 11*) in the name of his father. “It is a proven fact that any home that has a square amah in the correct location will stand firm forever, and so will its occupants.” If every family properly mourns the destruction of the *Bais Hamkdash* and has a *zecher lechurban*, perhaps this will be the catalyst for *Hashem* to bring the third *Beis Hamkdash*.

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