



על פי ד' יסעו בני ישראל ועל פי ד' יחנו

*According to the word of Hashem would Bnei Yisrael journey, and, according to the word of Hashem, they would encamp. (9:18)*

Hashem orchestrated and guided Klal Yisrael's journey through the wilderness. He employed the medium of the cloud that rested above the Mishkan as a signal. When the cloud began to move, it was a Heavenly signal to move on. It was time to fold the tents and pack their belongings for the next trip. They travelled until the cloud stopped, which was their signal to pitch their tents and unpack. No set time was established for how long they remained in each camp. At times, it could be months and even years – or it could be mere days. Regardless of the duration of their stay, Klal Yisrael remained prepared for whatever Hashem would send their way.

Sforno underscores Klal Yisrael's commitment to Hashem, and, by extension, their greatness. The first point of praise is that they encamped in the place in which the cloud stopped – regardless of the physical accoutrements of the area. It could very well be a place of waste, a howling wilderness. They accepted the conditions because this was the place in which Hashem wanted them to camp. Second, they did not just camp with one foot prepared to leave. They settled and waited for Hashem's signal that it was time to move on. Third, in some instances, they would arrive at a lush, beautiful place which appealed to them and was a pleasant area for their animals – only to have Hashem direct them to pull up stakes a few days later. They expressed no complaints, no moaning, just acquiescence to Hashem's directive. They had implicit trust in the Almighty. They realised that wherever they were, and for how long they stayed, Hashem was directing their path. They accepted this without fanfare and with total equanimity.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, applies Sforno's explanation to the spiritual realm as well. Without doubt, location plays a role in our spiritual mindset. Some areas are simply more conducive to spiritual growth. For some, a rural area, with its peace and quiet, is more facilitative. Others may thrive on the hustle, bustle and noise of a large metropolitan area. Some need to be surrounded by esoteric holiness, such as Eretz Yisrael; while others create their own sphere of sanctity. The bottom line is that, wherever we find ourselves, this is where Hashem wants us to be. This means that we can be successful spiritually in this place. So, we have no excuses. We do not run away from a location, shirk our responsibility, just because we have convinced ourselves that we cannot grow spiritually in this place. On the other hand, if one's family is unable to receive a Jewish education, if they are suffering spiritually, he must consult with someone who can give him sage advice. [It all depends on why he is there. If it was by choice for economic purposes, he should defer to the spiritual needs of his family. If it is part of his service to Hashem for outreach purposes, Hashem will take care of his family.]

I think that we can ratchet this up one more notch. Various geographical places and diverse situations present complex challenges. Economic hardship, health – of oneself, a spouse or a child – social and emotional challenges, all can (and do)

wreak havoc on the human psyche and affect the total person. Apparently, this is what Hashem wants of him. This has become his new place of residence. In other words, one can have it all, but still have nothing. He may present an exterior façade of calm and success, while internally he is churning and on the verge of a breakdown. I recently came across an inspiring quote (author unknown): "Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful." As Jews, we do not require challenges to make life meaningful, but Torah gives us a different perspective on challenge. We do not run from challenge, because Hashem placed us here amid the challenge, which He expects us to overcome. No difference exists between the various journeys which we experienced in the wilderness and the places we end up throughout our lives. A challenged mindset is analogous to an encampment. Just as Hashem shepherded us in the wilderness, He will guide us through the challenges. Our role is to hang on and allow Him to lead.

In his "Powerful Moments," Rabbi Yitzchak Hisiger relates an insight that he heard from Horav Shalom Arush, Shlita, which I feel is worth repeating due to its beautiful message. A rav asked someone for a ride to a certain hotel. The friend was happy to oblige. When the rav entered the car and sat down in the front seat, he noticed a second steering wheel on the passenger side in addition to the one on the driver's side. Assuming that the friend had opened a driving school, he wondered why he had not mentioned it to him. "No, no," his friend explained. "This is our family car." "I have never seen a family car with two steering wheels," the rav countered.

"Let me explain," the driver said. "We have a son who has difficulty sitting in one position. This can prove quite dangerous in a speeding car – especially if he is always trying to grab the steering wheel. I decided to install a fake steering wheel with which he loves to play. He is busy steering, so that I can concentrate on my driving."

Rav Arush gleans a noteworthy lesson from this story. We all think that we are driving the car of "life." We steer right and left, thinking that we are in fact controlling our destiny. Veritably, we are like that overactive boy who needs to think that he is in control of the car. The sooner we realise that our steering wheel is fake and that Hashem is the Driver and Navigator of our lives, we will be much calmer and happier. We will be able to relax and enjoy the trip.

ונסעו הקהתים נשאי המקדש

*Then journeyed the Kehasim, bearers of the Sanctuary. (10:21)*

Interestingly, the Torah refers to the Leviim who descended from Kehas as Kehasim, and those who descended from Gershon and Merari as Bnei Gershon and Bnei Merari. Why? Korban Ani explains that the sons of Kehas were zoche, merited, to carry the Aron and the other holy vessels. This was because they were a very close-knit, unified family. In Bereishis 49:10, Yaakov Avinu blesses Yehudah with the words, V'lo yikhas amim, "And his will be an assemblage of nations. Yikhas/kehas refers to an assemblage / congregation / aggregate, a gathering of people working together with a

common goal. As a result of their achdus, family unity, the Kehasim, unified ones, merited to carry the Aron.

An inspirational explanation, but what about Korach? He was a member of the family of Kehas. He has gone down in infamy as the symbol of machlokes, dissent, controversy, divisiveness. Where does he belong in the equation? Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, quotes Horav Leib Chasman, zl, who compares this with an unused cannon which has lain dormant for fifty years near one of the walls of Yerushalayim. This cannon had been forgotten after the war and did not bother anyone, until one day someone walked by the area and flicked a burning cigarette which landed on the cannon (which was still filled with unused gun powder). One can only begin to imagine the explosion that erupted as a result of that one burning cigarette. For fifty years, no one had walked there, and the cannon lay dormant, until one day... Likewise, Korach carried the Aron, maintained a harmonious relationship with everyone, until one day something ticked him off: Elitzafan ben Uriel became the Nasi, Prince. That was the burning cigarette that brought out the real Korach.

### לא כן עבדי משה בכל ביתי נאמן הוא

*Not so is my servant Moshe, in My entire household he is the trusted one. (12:7)*

Moshe Rabbeinu is like a trusted member of Hashem's Heavenly kingdom. The Torah alludes to Moshe's unique qualities, especially in the area of nevuah, prophecy, in which he stood out above all prophets. He is referred to as avdi Moshe, My servant Moshe, who is trusted. The question that presents itself is obvious. Is it an accolade to state that Moshe was honest and, thus, to be trusted? To possess moral and ethical integrity is a basic quality which Hashem demands and expects of every person. What is novel about Moshe's integrity and being trusted in Heaven? When one hires a worker, regardless of the job, the first question that he asks is: Is he/she honest? Horav Avraham Yoffen, zl, explains this practically.

A man was compelled to leave his home for a month. He travelled to a community where he knew no one. He was nervous about being accepted, but his fears were unfounded. The people opened up their homes to him and, within a few weeks, he literally became a member of the community. He was invited by a member of the community to stay in his home. He had an extra guest room in the basement, and he would be happy to have him. At first, the guest did not touch a thing in the kitchen unless his host offered it to him or he asked for it. He would never go to the refrigerator and take something to eat. After two weeks, however, he felt comfortable opening the refrigerator and taking an apple from the fruit bin. What changed from day one to the end of week two? Familiarity. He began to feel heimish, comfortable, as if he were a member of the family – which he was not.

This, explains the Rosh Yeshivah, is what could have transpired with Moshe – but did not. No one had such an open relationship with Hashem. Peh el peh Adaber bo, "Mouth to mouth do I speak to him." "In a clear vision and not in riddles." "At the image of Hashem does he gaze." Moshe was like a trusted member of the Heavenly sphere who was free to enter the Palace at will. Clearly, Moshe's familiarity with everything Heavenly could have made him lose sight of his humanness. He could go to the "refrigerator and take an apple." The Torah attests: "Not so, My servant Moshe; in My entire house, he is the trusted one." Moshe acutely understood who he was and to what he had access. Nonetheless, this never went to his head. He represented humility at its apex. As the humblest man on the earth, he never allowed his achievements to cloud his perception of himself.

The Chazon Ish, zl, was the undisputed gadol hador, pre-eminent Torah leader, of his generation. His knowledge of all areas of Torah was peerless. One of his close students (who today is a prominent Rosh Yeshivah) asked the Chazon Ish, "Does the Rebbe know his distinction?" The Chazon Ish, who was known for his unusual humility, replied, "Certainly, I know." The student countered, "If the Rebbe knows his own greatness, how is it that he acts in such an affable, unassuming manner?" The Chazon Ish explained, "Specifically, because I am acutely aware that Hashem has blessed me with exceptional capabilities, I realise how much I am capable of achieving. I tell myself that another person who had been born with such extraordinary talents would certainly have accomplished more than I. Having said this, over what should I arrogate? I fall ruefully short of my potential."

Horav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, zl, who was one of the pre-eminent Halachic arbiters of the previous generation, eulogised the Chazon Ish. In 1914, Rav Henkin became Rosh Yeshivah in Stowbtsy, Belarus. Prior to taking the position, he went to visit/present himself to the Rav of the community, Horav Yoel Sorotzkin, zl (brother of Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin). While he was in the Rav's house, he chanced upon a young man who was attired in ordinary clothes (not rabbinical garb). Rav Henkin asked the young man who he was. The reply was, "I am the son of the Rav of Kosava, Belarus, and I support myself here from the proceeds of a little store that I have." Rav Henkin asked, "Do you set times for learning? (Kovea Ittim)" "Yes, I attempt to learn when I am free." This was the entire exchange. Rav Henkin had no idea that he was speaking with the young (soon to be well-known as the) Chazon Ish.

Rav Henkin assumed that the young man was in the Rav's house because he had a monetary dispute which required the Rav's adjudication. Imagine his surprise when he was told that the young man was the author of a brilliant work which had taken the Torah world by storm. This volume was signed, Chazon Ish. During the Rav's absence, the young man became the proxy Rav to decide halachic queries. Rav Henkin spoke in learning, covering the gamut of halachah, penetrating the most complex areas of Jewish law, and he found the Chazon Ish to be proficient throughout every facet of halachah. Rav Henkin concluded that, despite the Chazon Ish's uncanny superiority in Torah, he continued to view himself as the "son of the Rav of Kosavo, who supports himself as a storekeeper."

Horav Emanuel Toledano, Shlita (Rosh Yeshivah, Sheeris Yosef Beer Yaakov), related that, prior to the bris of one of his sons, he was in a quandary concerning whom he should be mechabeid, give the honour, of sandek, holding the baby. On the one hand was his revered grandfather, Horav Refael Baruch Toledano, zl, one of the Sephardic community's Torah giants. On the other hand was the Ponovezher Rav, zl, who was his Rebbe. He asked the Rosh Yeshivah (Ponovezh), Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, for his advice. Rav Shach thought for a moment and said, "Give it to Ponovezher Rav, who, when he sees your grandfather, will surely demur and pass the honour to him." This is exactly how it played out. The Ponovezher Rav was a very busy man. He walked into the bris and donned his Tallis. He was about to sit down when he gazed upon Rav Toledano. He stood up, walked across the room and draped his Tallis over the shoulders of the Rav of Meknes, Morocco, and asked him to act as sandek. Truly great men manifest humility in their every action.

Miriam HaNeviyah partnered with her two illustrious brothers in leading Klal Yisrael out of Egypt and through their forty-year journey through the wilderness. The Torah relates that Miriam misspoke concerning Moshe Rabbeinu, making a comment that was considered lashon hora, slanderous speech. As a result, she was struck with tzaraas, spiritual leprosy. The metzora must be quarantined for seven days. During Miriam's seven-day isolation, the entire Klal Yisrael waited and did not journey to their next encampment. While this was considered a punishment to her, Klal Yisrael's remaining in place for the duration of her quarantine is a tribute to the esteem in which Hashem and Klal Yisrael held her. While this is impressive, would it not have been less humiliating had the nation moved forward, rather than everyone ruminating over the fact that they were "stuck" there because of Miriam's infraction? Furthermore, a debate in Menachos 95a explores whether the metzora should leave his quarantine when the nation travels. According to Rabbi Eliezer, the metzora travelled with the people. Why, then, could a dispensation not have been made with regard to Miriam?

Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita, cites an incident that occurred in the city of Slutsk, Belarus, during the Ridbaz's tenure as Rav (prior to his emigration to Eretz Yisrael, where he became Rav of Tzefas). The butcher in Slutsk was an honourable, G-d-fearing man. He was respected by all, and, as a result, he did quite well financially. The Jews of Slutsk were not all Orthodox. Sadly, a contingent of secular Jews had long reneged on such time-honoured laws as kashrus and Shabbos. In fact, for the most part, these men were heretics who denied the very existence of the Creator. One day, one of the community's distinguished physicians – a maskil, secular Jew, who believed in very little and observed even less – visited the butcher shop. He certainly was not there to purchase kosher meat. The butcher told him that he would be happy to serve him at another time. He was presently leaving the store to go learn in the shul.

"How do you allow yourself to leave on a Thursday which is probably the most lucrative day of the week?" The butcher answered that he had made enough money that day. "What about the people who count on you?" "I am not worried about them, since they will come tomorrow," the butcher answered. "Furthermore," he said, "I am more concerned with my portion in Olam Habba, the World-to-Come, than the few extra roubles that I would earn in this world." When the doctor heard this, he asked, "Since I do not believe in Olam Habba, can I sell you my portion?" "Sure," the butcher replied. "How much do you want for it?" "One rouble – that is all I think it is worth," the heretic said. The butcher agreed to the sale and immediately handed over a rouble. The deal was forgotten, as the two men went about their individual lives.

Years passed, and the doctor passed away. One morning, shortly after the doctor had left this world, a woman presented herself at the butcher store and introduced herself as the doctor's widow. "I need your help," the woman said. "My husband passed on to his eternal rest. The last couple of nights he has been appearing to me in a dream with the same request every night; 'Buy back the Olam Habba that I sold.' Apparently, he is about to be sent to Gehinnom, purgatory. He claimed that, as a physician, he had helped many people and even saved lives. Surely, that should count for some merit." The response was that, indeed, he had some merit, but alas, he had sold his Olam Habba for one rouble. There was nowhere for him to go other than purgatory. After much pleading, his neshamah was given permission to contact his

widow, so that she could "retrieve" the Olam Habba he had sold.

The butcher was called to the Rav. After listening to the woman, he said, "Veritably, when I purchased your husband's Olam Habba, I did not think that the portion was worth more than a rouble. Now that I hear what he has experienced in Heaven, I realise that he had many more merits than I thought. Thus, his Olam Habba is worth much more than a rouble. I will not sell it back unless I receive a premium on my purchase price." When two Jews present their case to a bona fide Rav, he will convene a bais din to adjudicate and resolve all issues. The Ridbaz instructed both parties to return later that day to present their cases.

The three judges listened, then adjourned to a room to discuss the case. Half an hour later, they returned. The Lutzker Rav, who was the rosh, head, of the bais din, spoke, "The final judgment is broken into three parts. First, one cannot sell his Olam Habba, because it is not his to sell. Olam Habba is part of a person. He performs a mitzvah; the mitzvah illuminates his soul and becomes a part of him. It is not an external saleable object. It is he himself! Second, one who is prepared to sell his Olam Habba loses it. Such a person removes himself from those worthy of a portion in the World to Come. He has forfeited his chance. He has demonstrated a disbelief that his neshamah will enter a better world. Third, we cannot ignore that as a result of this entire fiasco, the community of Slutsk's emunah, faith, in Olam Habba, was seriously elevated and strengthened. This alone is reason for the neshamah to warrant Gan Eden. Indeed, in this transaction, both the butcher and the doctor share an equal partnership.

Rav Levenstein returns to the original question: Why quarantine Miriam and have the entire nation wait for her? The humiliation does not fit the transgression. He explains that one who views quarantine as a punishment is in error. Isolating the metzora from the community is not a punishment, but rather, a kaparah, atonement, that will expiate his sin. Furthermore, during Miriam's seven-day isolation, the nation's awareness of what lashon hora can lead to – since everyone is vulnerable, even the greatest and holiest – would generate an incredible kiddush Shem Shomayim, sanctification of Hashem's Name, that would serve as a z'chus, merit, and kaparah for Miriam.

### ***Va'ani Tefillah***

**כי אין במות זכרך בשאול מי יודה לך**

**Ki ein ba'maves Zichrecha b'she'ol mi yodeh Lach.**

*For there is no mention of You in death;*

*In the lower world who will thank You?*

The Alshich Hakadosh explains David Hamelech's plea: "Hashem, I do not seek a refuah, healing, for my affliction, for personal benefit. All I want is to be able to praise You, both physically and spiritually. In death/in the grave, the physical self, the body, is unable to thank You for all that You have done and continue to do. Veritably, the living should receive praise from the living. Furthermore, in death we cannot mention You. The soul is unable to perform Your mitzvos unless it is part of a living, breathing human being. Likewise, the body lies in the grave, inanimate like a stone. We have no opportunity to perform mitzvos in the grave; Therefore, what value does a person have therein? It is not as if You attach Your Name to someone who is no longer carrying out mitzvos." To sum it up, David makes it abundantly clear that he has no personal agenda in asking to continue living. It is all so that he can continue serving Hashem, for, if he does not serve Hashem, neither he nor Hashem will benefit.

# Weekly Halacha Discussion

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

*A weekly discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav.*

## Cutting a Decorated Cake

The fundamental Torah prohibition of erasing letters on Shabbos applies to erasing for the purpose of preparing the surface for future writing, as this was the nature of Erasing in the *Mishkan*. *Miderabanan*, however, the prohibition includes all types of erasing, regardless of the purpose of the erasure and even when the erasure serves no purpose at all – such as tearing the lettering on a package.<sup>1</sup>

**Question:** On Shabbos, is it permissible to cut letters or pictures made of frosting that decorate a cake? Is it permitted to bite and chew a piece of cake that contains letters on it?

**Discussion:** *Rema*<sup>2</sup> rules that it is prohibited *miderabanan*, to cut or break off a piece of cake which is decorated with letters, pictures<sup>3</sup> or meaningful depictions<sup>4</sup> such as a star, a flower or a company logo. Although the person cutting the cake is interested only in cutting a piece of cake and has no intention of erasing the letters, it is still considered Erasing, based on the rule of “inevitable consequence” – *pesik reisha*. According to this view, it is also forbidden to bite and chew into a piece of cake that is decorated with letters or pictures, since doing so will cause the letters or pictures to be erased.<sup>5</sup>

Other *poskim*<sup>6</sup> differ with *Rema*. They maintain that cutting or breaking letters on a cake is not considered Erasing because;

1) the erasing is not done for the sake of future writing and it is destructive, and

2) it is unintentional and

3) it is indirect (*kelachar yad*). According to this view it is permitted to cut or break a piece of cake with letters or pictures, and it is certainly permitted to bite and chew a piece of decorated cake.

Among the *poskim*, some are inclined to be lenient regarding this subject,<sup>7</sup> while others are stringent.<sup>8</sup> Beyond that, *Mishnah Berurah*<sup>9</sup> differentiates between biting (or chewing) a piece of cake that contains letters – which he says is permitted, and between cutting the cake – which he says is prohibited.

While the custom follows *Mishnah Berurah*'s ruling, the following leniencies are discussed by the *poskim*:

- ◆ It is permitted to cut letters which are made from fruit juice or from honey mixed with water, as decorations fashioned from those ingredients are not considered “permanent.”<sup>10</sup> The sugar-based frosting commonly found on cakes today, which hardens when it dries, is not included in this category.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ It is permitted to cut letters or figures that are baked into the body of the cake itself.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ It is permitted to cut a cake or biscuit that has a meaningful shape, or is shaped like a letter – such as a biscuit shaped as a Sefer Torah, animal crackers, or Alpha-Bits.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ It is permitted to cut the space between letters even though a word will be broken.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ It is permitted to remove a letter of the icing along with a thin sliver of cake on which it rests.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ If the cake [and the letters or pictures on top] was sliced before Shabbos, it is permitted on Shabbos to separate and lift the pieces of cake, even though this will cause the letters or pictures on top to crumble.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ Some *poskim* allow a right-handed person to cut the cake with his left hand, and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> Others do not agree with this leniency.<sup>18</sup>
- ◆ A cake with lettering may be placed in front of a child even though the child may erase the lettering on the cake.<sup>19</sup> An adult should not, however, explicitly instruct the child to erase the lettering.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Mishnah Berurah* 340:15. *Chazon Ish* 61:1 questions this leniency.

<sup>11</sup> *Tiferes Yisrael* (*Kalkes Shabbos*, Erasing); *Ketzos Hashulchan* 144:2, note 3; *Be'er Moshe* 6:92.

<sup>12</sup> *Mishnah Berurah* 340:15; *Har Tzvi* 1:214. Elsewhere, *Mishnah Berurah* seems to contradict himself and prohibits this; see 475:47 and 500:17 and *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah* 11, footnote 31. See also *Chazon Ish* 61:1 who seems to question this leniency; see *Orchos Shabbos* 15, footnote 36.

<sup>13</sup> See previous footnote. In this case, even *Chazon Ish* seems to be lenient; see *Shevet Halevi* 9:25.

<sup>14</sup> Rav S. Z. Auerbach (*Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah* 9, footnote 51). See *Avnei Neizer* 210, *Orchos Shabbos* 15, footnote 27 and *Machazeh Eliyahu* 2:30-19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ketzos Hashulchan* 144:2, note 3. We are not concerned that the letter or picture may break apart during removal.

<sup>16</sup> Rav S. Z. Auerbach (*Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah* 11, footnote 30). See note in *Shulchan Shelomo* 340:8-3 for an explanation. See also *Hilchos Shabbos B'Shabbos* 14:20. See, however, *Megilas Sefer* 18:4 and *Orchos Shabbos* 15:20 who question this leniency.

<sup>17</sup> *Eliyahu Rabbah* 340:11.

<sup>18</sup> *Avnei Neizer* 209:9. *Mishnah Berurah*, too, does not quote this option. See also *Mishnah Berurah* 340:22 quoting *Chayei Adam* who maintains that—with the exception of *koseiv*, Writing – there is no distinction between using the right or left hand regarding Shabbos prohibitions.

<sup>19</sup> *Mishnah Berurah* 340:14. See explanation in *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 340:4 and 343:10. See also *Chanoch Lena'ar* 17:4-5.

<sup>20</sup> *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 343:10.

<sup>1</sup> See *Mishnah Berurah* 340:41 and *Sha'ar Hatziyun* 76.

<sup>2</sup> *O.C.* 340:3.

<sup>3</sup> *Mishnah Berurah* 340:16.

<sup>4</sup> *Orchos Shabbos* 15, footnote 28, maintains that simple designs such as a circle, a square or a frame around the edge of a cake are not considered pictures and may be cut. See also *Shulchan Shelomo* 340:8-2.

<sup>5</sup> The prohibition applies only if a significant part of the letter or picture will be broken. If, however, the basic form and shape of the letter or picture remains intact, Erasing did not take place; See *Igros Moshe*, *Y.D.* 2:75.

<sup>6</sup> *Dagul Mirevavah* 340:5, quoted by *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 340:5.

<sup>7</sup> *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 80:63; *Meishiv Davar* 2:80. See also *Aruch Hashulchan* 340:23, who maintains that *Rema*'s prohibition only applies when the letters are formed from ink or paint, not from edible material. [See also *Chayei Adam* 38:4.] Nevertheless, he advises to be stringent; if a cake has letters on it, a child should be the one to cut it, as quoted below.

<sup>8</sup> *Shulchan Aruch Harav* 340:4; 343:10; *Kaf Hachayim* 340:29; *Chazon Ish* 61:1, who all maintain that erasing *miderabanan* is violated when letters or pictures on a cake are broken or erased.

<sup>9</sup> 340:17.