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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

THE RED CARPET TREATMENT

“...that you should take of the first of every fruit of the ground that your bring in from your Land that the L-rd your G-d gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the L-rd your G-d will choose to make His Name rest there.” (26:2)

Once heard Rabbi Noach Orlowek say to someone who had just complimented him on the *shiur* (lecture) he had given, “Thank you so much. Rabbis also need encouragement.”

If you were to ask me as a *rebbe* (teacher) in a Ohr Somayach, what is the most important quality that a *rebbe* must have, I would say the ability to give one’s *talmidim* (students) the belief that they can succeed.

The Mishna in Tractate Bikurim says that when the bearers of the “first fruits” approached Jerusalem, even hired workers in the middle of their work were obliged to down tools and greet them, saying: “Welcome, our brothers from (such and such place)!” And a flute played in front of them all the way until they reached the Temple Mount with their offerings.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 33a and Chullin 54b) points out an apparent contradiction to this. It says that a hired worker is forbidden to stop his work even to stand for a *Talmid Chacham* (Torah scholar). Rabbi Yosi Bar Avin resolves this matter: “In the case of *bikurim*, if the bringers don’t receive an enthusiastic reception there is a possibility that next year they won’t want to go through the trouble of bringing their

first fruits up to Jerusalem at all.”

There is something puzzling about this: The halacha says that a hired worker is forbidden to stop work even to greet a Torah scholar — in other words that’s the right thing to do. Nevertheless when it comes to *bikurim*, if the workers don’t stop and greet those bringing their *bikurim* they are considered in the wrong. But surely, those who are bringing the *bikurim* should overcome their feelings of lethargy and rouse themselves even though they will not get a “red-carpet” reception! After all, it’s their mitzvah.

Even if a *talmid* lacks the appropriate motivation to fulfill his mitzvah of learning Torah, but the *rebbe* has not done everything to roll out the red carpet for him — to imbue him with the enthusiasm and the belief that he can succeed — the responsibility is the *rebbe*’s and not the *talmid*’s.

My father was a furniture manufacturer for most of his adult life. He used to say to me, “There’s no such thing as a bad worker — just a bad boss.”

If that’s true of furniture, how much more are we, as teachers and mentors, responsible for the success of our wards?

• Source: based on the *Chiddushei Halev*

EDITOR’S NOTE:

In the Torah Weekly insight for Devarim the article stated that Moshe Rabbeinu was teaching Torah though he was still sitting shiva for Aharon HaKohen, quoting Mo’ed Katan 21b as the source. The author and Ohrnet regret the incorrect source and, although the author recalls seeing the teaching that he wrote, we request that it not be accepted as absolute truth. In the meantime the author and editorial staff are further researching the subject and invite our readers to share in shedding any additional light on this topic. We offer our apology and our gratitude to our readers.

BY RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN

SANHEDRIN 51 - 57

Commandments Before and After Sinai

Ten mitzvot were commanded to the Jewish People at Marah: Seven of these they had accepted on themselves as Bnei Noach, and added to them were (three new mitzvot): Laws, Shabbat and honoring one's father and one's mother. As it is written "There He gave them a statute and an ordinance, and there He tested them." (Shmot 15:25)

Maharitz Chiyut points out that we see from this teaching that the mitzvah of honoring one's father and the mitzvah of honoring one's mother are all one mitzvah. Otherwise there would have been *four* additional mitzvot added at Marah, besides the original seven mitzvot Bnei Noach. He points out that this understanding of the mitzvah to honor one's parents is not in accordance with the teachings of the Sefer Mitzvot Gedolot and the Ramban, who both hold that the mitzvah of honoring one's father and one's mother constitutes two separate mitzvot. (He also explains why the seven mitzvot Bnei Noach were repeated at Marah, as implied in our gemara, and cites a fundamental teaching of the Rambam: All mitzvot that we have and keep today are due to their having been given to us at Mount Sinai, and not due to any command that preceded the Sinai experience when we received the Torah with all its mitzvot.)

• Sanhedrin 56b

The Jewish and Egyptian Midwives

In the name of Rabbi Yishmael the Rabbi said, "A Ben Noach is obligated the death penalty also for killing a fetus."

This statement on our daf is one of many teachings regarding the mitzvot, laws and sources applicable to a Ben Noach. The Maharsha addresses this statement of Rabbi Yishmael, and with it offers a fascinating explanation that gives a special insight into a well-known part of the Jewish history in Egypt.

When Pharaoh decreed to kill the Jewish male babies, the verse states, "The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one who was named Shifrah, and the second, who was named Puah. And he said, 'When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see on the birth-stool, if it is a son, you shall put him to death, but if it is a daughter, she may live.'" (Ex. 1:15-16)

An oft-asked question asked by learners of these verses is why Pharaoh spoke to the Hebrew midwives to act in this way, and not to the Egyptian midwives. Were there no Egyptian midwives in Egypt? And wouldn't one think that they would have even more motivation and obedience to Pharaoh to obey his command to kill the Jewish babies?

The Maharsha explains this portion of the Torah based on the teaching of Rabbi Yishmael. Certainly, he explains, Pharaoh didn't ask or command the Egyptian midwives to actively kill the babies, because a Ben Noach is prohibited from killing another person — even a fetus, as Rabbi Yishmael teaches here. But he did tell the Jewish midwives to kill the fetus while it was still inside the mother, since it was permitted for them as Jews to do so. The Jewish midwives were prohibited to kill the baby only once its head or majority of its body emerged from the mother into "the air of the world". And since the Jewish midwives needed to do the deed before the fetus emerged, signs that indicated that the fetus was a male even before it emerged were provided to the Jewish midwives so they could act as commanded — in a permitted way — and kill the fetus before it was born. (See the first chapter Tractate Sotah for early signs that revealed in advance the gender of the child.)

And let us not forget the righteous Jewish midwives, of course, who disobeyed the command of Pharaoh to kill the Jewish babies, as the verse states, "The midwives, however, feared G-d; so they did not do as the king of Egypt had spoken to them, but they enabled the boys to live." (Ex. 1:17)

• Sanhedrin 57b

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mount Eval and six on Mount Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray”?
12. How does one “strike another secretly”?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mount Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb”?
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim, levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s Parsha the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

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A JEWISH MONUMENT

In Devarim, chapter 27, Moshe tells the people to set up large stones immediately after having crossed the Jordan River into the Land of Israel. When other nations, such as the Romans, conquered foreign territory, they established physical signs of their presence, such as monuments, and renamed streets and cities to glorify their power and domination. The Jewish People, on the other hand, are instructed to erect a monument to the glory and honor of G-d who gave them the Land. Moshe tells them not to make a simple list of the *mitzvot* on the stones, but rather to inscribe a recounting of how G-d took them out of Egypt, and how G-d sustained them in the wilderness and defeated their enemies in order to bring them into the Land of Israel. The people would have naturally erected such a monument; Moshe is simply instructing them to emphasize the true meaning of their conquest.

Moshe then instructs the people to bring the stones to Mount Eval. They were to use them to build an altar for sacrificial offerings. The altar was then to be dismantled and given a new inscription. Some commentators say that the entire Torah was to be inscribed, while others say only the Book of Devarim was inscribed. In any case, by setting up the stones immediately upon crossing the Jordan River, using them for an altar, and finally setting them up as a permanent monument, these stones are a physical testimony to the entire purpose of the conquest of the Land of Israel. In his grammatical analysis of these few verses, Abarbanel emphasizes a concept that occurs many times in the Torah's narratives. Moshe took the natural inclinations of the people to commemorate their conquest, and steered them into focusing on their relationship with G-d and the importance of the Land of Israel.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE BIKURIM PARADE

This week we read in the Torah about the mitzvah of bringing the *bikurim* – the first crops and fruits of the seven species for which Eretz Yisrael is praised – to the Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim.

Our Talmudic Sages offer us this colorful description of the procession that took place in the bringing of *bikurim*:

“The ox bearing the produce walked before them, its horns covered with gold and a crown of olive branches



on its head. With the music of a flute accompanying them they recited the Psalm (122) in which King David exclaims, “I rejoiced when they said to me let us go to the House of G-d.” As they neared Yerushalayim they sent a messenger to inform its residents of their arrival and decorated their *bikurim*. Important officials went out to welcome them, and all the craftsmen in the city stood up in their honor and greeted them. Music continued to accompany them until they reached the Beit Hamikdash.”

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

A TIME OF DIVINE FAVOR

The days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are days of Divine favor. Even though G-d accepts the repentance (*teshuva*) of those that return to Him wholeheartedly the entire year, being that these are days of mercy and favor they are unparalleled and most suitable for *teshuva*.

Here is what the holy Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) wrote in connection to the following verse dealing with the laws connected with accidental death: “If one did not lie in ambush but G-d caused it to come to his hand (to happen), I shall provide for you a place for him to flee (Shemot 21:13). The initials of the words “*Ina leyado vesanti lecha* — caused it to happen, I shall provide” form the acronym “Elul”. This teaches us that just as the city of refuge served as a physical place where a person found protection and atonement, so too the month of Elul serves as a favorable place in time for a person’s *teshuva* to be accepted. It also alludes to the fact that even sins committed inadvertently require *teshuva*.

The Dorshei Reshumot (“the interpreters of allusions”, a

title given to Tana'im who wrote allegoric teachings) reveal other well-known acronyms for the month of Elul. It is written, “And the Lord your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children.” The initials of the words “*et levavecha ve'et levav*” form the acronym “Elul”. They also explain that the initials of the verse in Shir HaShirim 6:3, “I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me” form the acronym “Elul”. The initials of the verse “*Ish lere'eihu umatanot la'evyonim*” — One to another and gifts to the poor (Esther 9:22) — also form the acronym “Elul”.

These acronyms allude to three things: *Teshuva*, prayer and charity, all which should be practiced zealously during the month of Elul. The verse “G-d will circumcise...” alludes to repentance, for one’s heart when uncontrolled leads a person to sin. “I am to my beloved...” alludes to prayer, which is the song of love between a person and his Creator. “One to another and gifts to the poor,” alludes to charity.

• Based on the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Laws of Elul I*

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ELUL: PART 2 – Now!

Continuing our essays on synonyms related to the concept of time, we shall now meet the words for “now”. There are three words for “now” in Hebrew, and four in Aramaic. In Hebrew we find the words *atah*, *na*, and *achshav* that all mean “now”, while in Aramaic we find the words *ke'an*, *ke'don*, *hashta*, and *ha'idna*. In the following paragraphs we will explore the etymologies of some of these words and attempt to demonstrate how their technical meanings might differ from one another.

The most common Hebrew word for “now” in the Bible is *atah* — it appears more than 430 times. *Atah* is related to the Hebrew word *eit* (“time”) because its first two letters are *ayin-tav*, which spells *eit*. The next most common word for “now” in the Bible is *na* (spelled *nun-aleph*). While that word might sometimes mean “raw” or “please”, its primary meaning is “now”. The connection between “raw” and “now” is fairly obvious: If I must eat my food *now* and I cannot wait until it is fully-cooked, I will end up eating it *raw*. Interestingly, the English word “now” possibly comes from the similar-sounding Hebrew word *na*.

The third Hebrew word for “now” is *achshav*. This word never appears in the Bible, but it appears quite frequently in rabbinical writings and has been adopted by Modern Hebrew as the principle word for “now”. Remarkably, the earliest documented instance of the word *achshav* is in the Dead Sea Scrolls (specifically in the scroll designated 4Q225). The famous Talmudic linguist Dr. Marcus Jastrow (1829-1903) proposed that the word *achshav* is a contraction of the phrase *atah kemo shehu* (“now, as it is”). If this is the case, then *achshav* is not quite a synonym of *atah*, but is actually based on that word and denotes a slightly different idea. (Parenthetically, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) writes that he has seen

some people spell the word *achshav* with a *yod* as the penultimate letter, but deems such an insertion of the letter *yod* unnecessary.)

The word *ke'an* is the only Aramaic word for “now” which appears in the Bible (that is, the Aramaic parts of the post-Exilic books Daniel and Ezra). It is also the usual word that the Targumim use for translating *atah* and *na*. Like his explanation of *achshav*, Jastrow argues that *ke'an* is also a contraction or abbreviation of the Aramaic word *ke'idana* (literally, “according to [this] time”), as is the related Aramaic word *ke'don*.

Looking at words for “now” as contractions is not Dr. Jastrow’s innovation, as Rabbi Wolf Heidenheim (1757-1832) already offered a similar idea in his Rödelheim Machzor. There he writes that the Aramaic word *hashta* is a contraction of the two word Aramaic phrase *ha shaata* (“this hour”), which conceptually means the same thing as “now”. It is interesting to note that a certain Aramaic passage in the Haggadah recited on Passover night reads “now (we are) here (i.e. in exile), next year (we will be in) the Land of Israel”, and a disagreement arose between different authorities over whether the term for “now” should be *hashta* or *ha shaata*.

Even before Rabbi Heidenheim, Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia (1606-1675) wrote that the last word for “now” in Aramaic, *ha'idna*, is a portmanteau of the term *ha idana* (“this time”), which is more or less the meaning of “now”. However, the Aramaic words *idan* or *idana* are spelled with the letter *ayin* appearing as the first letter, while the word *haidna* is spelled with an *aleph*, instead of an *ayin*.

Author’s note:

Le'Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

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BURIAL

From: Shirley in Denver

*Dear Rabbi,
The Torah says that man must return to dust. Does this necessarily mean burial, or could cremation also be acceptable?*

Dear Shirley,

Your question involves two issues, burial and cremation. This week I'll discuss burial, and another time — G-d willing — cremation.

The requirement to bury the dead is from the verse, "If a man committed a sin worthy of death you shall surely bury him that day" (Deut. 21:23). The verse "For you are dust and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19) teaches that ideally a buried body should be in contact with the ground. Upon death the soul cannot fully depart until the body has completely disintegrated. On the other hand, an abrupt departure would cause the soul great agony. Burial ensures the gradual, but eventual, decay of the body, needed to benefit the soul. Our Sages thus remarked: Burial is not for the sake of the living, but rather for the dead.

Burial actually preceded the giving of the Torah. The Midrash relates that G-d brought before Cain a bird burying another, in order to teach him to bury Hevel. Similarly, all of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were buried: "and his sons buried [Abraham]" (Gen. 25:9-10); "and [Isaac's] sons buried him" (Gen. 35:29); "for his sons buried [Jacob]" (50:13); "Abraham buried Sarah" (Gen. 23:19); "there they buried Rebecca and Leah" (Gen. 49:31); and "[Jacob] buried [Rachel] in Beit Lechem" (Gen. 48:7).

Even Joseph, who died in Egypt, imposed an oath on the children of Israel saying, "G-d will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (Gen. 50:25). Moses fulfilled the oath (Ex. 13:19) and eventually the bones of Joseph they buried in Shechem (Joshua 24:32). Further, the Talmud teaches that one of the ways a Jew imitates G-d in performing acts of righteousness is by burying the dead, as G-d did for Moses: "And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moav" (Deut. 34:6).

After the giving of the Torah burial became obligatory. Counted as one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, anyone who prevents himself or others from being buried uproots a positive Torah requirement to bury, and also transgresses a negative Torah prohibition of leaving a body unburied. In fact, the Talmud states that anyone who orders before his death that his body should not be buried, his order must be disregarded — and this is the halacha.

Sources:

- *R. Manashe ben Israel, Nishmat Chaim 2:26*
- *Sanhedrin 47a*
- *Tur, Yoreh De'ah 362; Beit Yosef in the name of Ramban, Torat HaAdam p. 117*
- *Tanchuma, Ber. 10. See also Ber. Rabba 22:8 and Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 21*
- *Sotah 14a*
- *Rambam, Sanhedrin 15:8; Evel 12:1; Sefer HaMitzvot, aseh 231*
- *Halachot Gedolot; Semag 104; Sefer HaChinuch 537*
- *Sanhedrin 46b; Rambam, Evel 12.1; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 348:2*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei*

Yisrael cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

YEHUDA PINCHAS ZOMERSHAYN

Age 22 - Budapest, Hungary

Yehuda Pinchas was born in Hungary just over the Serbian border. His birth was during the time of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999) when the country of Yugoslavia was violently split apart by ethnic and religious conflicts. When he was four years old his family moved to the city of Tompa in Southern Hungary. Yehuda Pinchas thought of himself and his family as Serbians, and he grew up in a Balkan-Serbian refugee community in Hungary. He didn't know it at the time, but he was actually Jewish. In high school he questioned everything and was known as a troublemaker. He felt that he was different than his classmates at school, but didn't know why. He was, however, an excellent student and entered the Eotvos Lorand (ELTE) University in Budapest, one of the most prestigious universities in Hungary. His major field was applied mathematics and he had taught himself Java programming. At 19, while still a student, he was hired by the global banking giant — Morgan Stanley — as a programmer/developer. The bank has a back-office operation in Budapest where it employs many mathematicians, which services the retail operations all over the world.

When he was 16 his maternal great-uncle revealed to him the family's deepest secret — that they were actually Jews. He discovered that his grandmother was born in Hungary after World War II, but because of the virulent anti-Semitism at that time (which still exists even today) in Hungary they fled to northern Yugoslavia — an area with a large number of Serbs, who by contrast, are quite friendly to Jews. His mother eventually married a non-Jew and never disclosed her Jewish background, even to her children. Upon discovering his heritage, Yehuda Pinchas decided to investigate it. He first looked into the Reform Jewish community in Budapest. They seemed quite cold and he didn't see any difference in behavior or customs

between them and Christian Hungarians. His next stop was the main shul of the Hungarian Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community in Budapest. Although he was dressed in shorts and sandals, the Jews there were quite welcoming. When he asked if he could come and pray with them, one of them suggested that he change his clothes to something more conservative and come back tomorrow for Shabbat. He came back the next evening, Friday, and spent that Shabbat with some Satmar families in the community. He loved it. He bought a prayer book and started coming to shul with regularity in the evenings after work. After davening Ma'ariv he would often stay for a shiurim given by a local rabbi, and was fascinated by everything and became convinced of the truth of the Torah. He later started attending another shiur in Yiddish on Shabbat afternoons. One of his new-found friends suggested that he really needed to learn gemara and halacha, and recommended a Litvische-style Kollel that was involved in outreach. It was headed by Rabbi Keleti, from Jerusalem, who came to Budapest monthly to give shiurim and direction to the students. Yehuda Pinchas learned there at night for three years. He spent almost every Shabbat and Yom Tov with the Satmar Chassidim.

After graduation Yehuda Pinchas decided to spend an extended time in Yeshiva. On the recommendation to his rabbis he came to Ohr Somayach in April of this year. He intends to stay for at least two to three years. Although he dresses like a Chassid and speaks Yiddish, which he picked up in Budapest, he has not decided on the type of Chassid he will eventually become. In the meantime he keeps up with computer programming and has a number of private clients. He learns in the Yeshiva with Rabbi Shlomo Zweig and is enjoying his time at Ohr Somayach immensely.

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D.I.Y. MEZUZAH?

Before you run off to Home Depot for some parchment, ink, and quills, you might want to consider a few pesky details about writing your own *mezuzot*.

Some authorities assert that the *writing* of a mezuzah is part of the mitzvah. From that perspective one might be tempted to say: "It is a greater mitzvah to perform a mitzvah by oneself than to appoint an agent to do it for him." However, even these authorities agree that the main mitzvah is fulfilled later, at the moment of placement, or by the fact that the mezuzah is there. Consequently, by your involvement in affixing the mezuzah by yourself, you would still have a chunk of the "greater mitzvah."

Don't underestimate the complexity of the writing process. The hardest part about learning to be a *sofer* (scribe) is not the mastery of its unique calligraphy, but rather becoming expert in the thousands of laws that apply to *mezuzot* and all the other texts written on parchment.

Although one does not have to be a rabbi to practice as a *sofer*, he must undergo rigorous training and, in modern times, is tested and apprenticed in order to be certified by regulatory bodies. A *sofer* must be a G-d-fearing and pious person. A mezuzah, and especially its Divine names, must be written with utmost purity and intention. It is therefore customary that the *sofer* immerse himself in a *mikveh* (ritual pool) before beginning his work.

Moreover, the Talmud accentuates the great responsibility that rests on the shoulders of the *sofer* entrusted

with this spiritually powerful mitzvah:

Rabbi Meir (reported)... When I learned with Rabbi Yishmael, he said to me, "My son, what is your profession?" I said, "I am a scribe." He said to me, "My son, be careful, as your work is the work of Heaven, for if you leave out one letter or add one letter, it is as though you have destroyed the whole world."

Skillful calligraphy is also a consideration, as the Torah enjoins us to beautify the *mitzvot* we perform. Even if you are a talented amateur it is unlikely that your writing will be as pleasing as that of a trained professional, and some authorities opine that affixing a beautifully written mezuzah may take precedence over the value of your personal involvement in the writing.

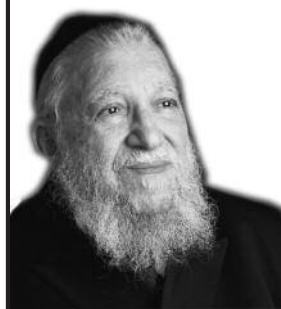
You may have seen that at a celebration marking the completion of a Torah scroll, several letters are left over to be filled in by those present so that this may give them a part in the mitzvah of writing the Torah. But we do not find that the last letters of a mezuzah are left over for the buyer, possibly because of the risk of the layman making an error that will be difficult to fix or due to other considerations.

So, it may be a "greater mitzvah" for you to rush out to Home Depot for a hammer and some nails for those shelves that you have been promising your wife you would put up "*mañana*."

• Sources: *Kidushin 41a, Sotah 20a, Agur B'Ohaleha 2:8*

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