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PARSHA INSIGHT

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

“Church and State”

“And these are the statutes...” (21:1)

The phrase “separation between Church and State” is generally traced to a January 1, 1802 letter by Thomas Jefferson, addressed to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut, and published in a Massachusetts newspaper. Jefferson wrote: *“I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.”*

Jefferson was echoing the language of the founder of the first Baptist church in America, Roger Williams, who had written in 1644: *“A hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.”*

Judaism has never had this problem. It has always seen its job as bringing “the wilderness of the world” into “the garden of ‘the church’” and not let the world wander into greater and deeper wilderness.

“And these are the statutes...”

Why are the laws of Judaism’s social contract juxtaposed with those of the rites of the Holy Altar in the Beit Hamikdash?, asks Rashi. He answers that the Torah is teaching us that the Sanhedrin, the supreme legislative body, should occupy a chamber adjacent to the Holy Altar.

Judaism sees no dichotomy between Divine service and the legislation of social conduct. They are both within the purview of faith without the need for walls or hedges.

Jefferson’s metaphor of a wall of separation has been cited repeatedly by the U.S. Supreme Court. In *Reynolds v. United States* (1879) the Court wrote that Jefferson’s comments “may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the (First) Amendment.” In *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), Justice Hugo Black wrote: “In the words of Thomas Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and state.”

In contrast to *separationism*, the Supreme Court of the United States in *Zorach v. Clauson* upheld *accommodationism*, holding that the nation’s “institutions presuppose a Supreme Being” and that government recognition of G-d does not constitute the establishment of a state church as the Constitution’s authors intended to prohibit. As such, the Court has not always interpreted the constitutional principle as absolute, and the proper extent of separation between government and religion in the U.S. remains an ongoing subject of impassioned debate.

• Source: Based on the *Avnei Ezel*

BY RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN

Avodah Zara 16 - 22

Whatever Your Heart Desires

Rebbi said, "A person learns Torah only from a place that his heart desires."

In the *gemara*, a seemingly identical statement is made by Rava: "A person should always learn Torah in a place where his heart desires." Both teachings are based on a verse in Tehillim (1:2) that states, "But *his desire* is in the Torah of G-d, and in His Torah he meditates day and night." The words "his desire" indicate that the Torah's learner's desire is essential for his Torah study.

Question: Are Rebbi and Rava in fact expressing the same idea? This would seem unlikely: the *gemara* would be teaching a redundancy, which is something we would not expect to find in *Shas*. And are we able to clarify this idea, or these ideas, in a more concrete and practical manner?

First let us examine the context of Rebbi's statement. The Sages Levi and Rabbi Shimon the son of Rebbi were sitting in front of Rebbi and learning the meaning of certain verses in Tanach from him. When they finished the *sefer* they were learning, they each made differing requests regarding what *sefer* to learn next. Levi said he wanted to learn Mishlei, and Rabbi Shimon the son of Rebbi asked for Tehillim. Somehow, Levi was overruled, and Sefer Tehillim was brought for them to learn. When they reached the second verse — "But *his desire* is in the Torah of G-d" — Rebbi expounded it to be teaching that "A person learns Torah only from a place that his heart desires." Upon hearing this, Levi said, "Rebbi, with this teaching you have given me permission to stand up (from learning Tehillim, and to learn Mishlei instead, as I *desire*)." Rashi explains: A Rav should teach his student only a *masechet* that the student requests to learn from him, because if the Rav teaches a different *masechet*, the learning will not be successful since the student's heart is distracted by his interest in the other subject that he desires.

The Maharsha explains that the statements of Rebbi and Rava are in fact emphasizing two different aspects of what a student needs in order for his Torah study to produce the greatest fruits. Rebbi emphasizes the importance of studying the *masechet* and *sefer* that the student desires. This is what Rebbi conveys with his choice of wording: *mi'makom, from the place in the Torah* that the student desires. This was illustrated in the *gemara's* story about Rebbi, that involved his students Levi and Rabbi Shimon his son. Rava, on the other hand, selects the word *ba'makom*, meaning "*in the place* that the student desires." This, the Maharsha explains, refers to the importance of a student of Torah to choose a teacher whom he feels will be best suited to teach him, and from whom he will learn Torah in an optimal manner. This reference to "in a place" might also mean going to another city or changing to another yeshiva in order to find the best Rabbi to learn from. Both teachings, Rebbi's and Rava's, are true and complementary.

I personally recall being told the principle taught in our *sugya* in the form of a practical response to a question I asked Rav Moshe Shapiro some 45 years ago. I was a student in his *kollel* at the time, and it was on the final day of the *zman*. As we travelled together to Bayit Vegan, after the final *shiur* until the next *zman*, I asked him, "Why do the *bein hazmanim* (intercession) periods in a yeshiva or *kollel* constitute more days per year than a person would normally receive as days off if he were working at a typical job?" His reply to me at the time was that these days are an opportunity to learn parts of the Torah, commentaries and Torah *sefarim* "*k'fi sh'libo chafetz*" — according to the desire of each person's heart. During the *zman* there is a strict regimen of what is studied at each hour of the day, generally being the same subjects for all of the students. But part of the year is left for the Torah student to leave his home, go to a *beit midrash* and study "that which his heart desires". The practical decision of how to do this in an optimum manner, however, should be made with the guidance of a Rav — and Rav Shapiro guided me carefully at the time. And although the underlying goal in every case is to learn that which "one's heart desires", the exact path to achieving this goal will almost certainly vary from student to student, and from one time to the next.

• *Avoda Zara 19a*

PARSHA Q&A?

1. In what context is a *mezuzah* mentioned in this week's parsha?
2. What special mitzvah does the Torah give to the master of a Hebrew maidservant?
3. What is the penalty for wounding one's father or mother?
4. A intentionally hits B. As a result, B is close to death. Besides any monetary payments, what happens to A?
5. What is the penalty for someone who tries to murder a particular person, but accidentally kills another person instead? Give two opinions.
6. A slave goes free if his master knocks out one of the slave's teeth. What teeth do not qualify for this rule and why?
7. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, provided his animal had gored no more than twice previously?
8. From where in this week's parsha can the importance of work be demonstrated?
9. What is meant by the words "If the sun shone on him"?
10. A person is given an object for safe-keeping. Later, he swears it was stolen. Witnesses come and say that in fact he is the one who stole it. How much must he pay?
11. A person borrows his employee's car. The car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay?
12. Why is lending money at interest called "biting"?
13. Non-kosher meat, "*treifa*," is preferentially fed to dogs. Why?
14. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
15. What constitutes a majority-ruling in a capital case?
16. How is Shavuot referred to in this week's parsha?
17. How many prohibitions are transgressed when cooking meat and milk together?
18. What was written in the *Sefer Habrit* which Moshe wrote prior to the giving of the Torah?
19. What was the *livnat hasapir* a reminder of?
20. Who was Efrat? Who was her husband? Who was her son?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's questions! - All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 21:6 - If a Hebrew slave desires to remain enslaved, his owner brings him "to the doorpost *mezuzah*" to pierce his ear.
2. 21:8,9 - To marry her.
3. 21:15 - Death by strangulation.
4. 21:19 - He is put in jail until B recovers or dies.
5. 21:23 - 1)The murderer deserves the death penalty. 2)The murderer is exempt from death but must compensate the heirs of his victim.
6. 21:26 - Baby teeth, which grow back.
7. 21:35 - The full value of his own animal.
8. 21:37 - From the "five-times" penalty for stealing an ox and slaughtering it. This fine is seen as punishment for preventing the owner from plowing with his ox.
9. 22:2 - If it's as clear as the sun that the thief has no intent to kill.
10. 22:8 - Double value of the object.
11. 22:14 - Nothing.
12. 22:24 - Interest is like a snake bite. Just as the poison is not noticed at first but soon overwhelms the person, so too interest is barely noticeable until it accumulates to an overwhelming sum.
13. 22:30 - As "reward" for their silence during the plague of the first-born.
14. 23:1 - Targum Onkelos translates "Don't bear a false report" as "Don't receive a false report".
15. 23:2 - A simple majority is needed for an acquittal. A majority of two is needed for a ruling of guilty.
16. 23:16 - *Chag Hakatzir* — Festival of Reaping.
17. 23:19 - One.
18. 24:4,7 - The Torah, starting from Bereishet until the giving of the Torah, and the *mitzvot* given at Mara.
19. 24:10 - That the Jews in Egypt were forced to toil by making bricks.
20. 24:14 - Miriam, wife of Calev, mother of Chur.

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LOVE of the LAND

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

Nechemiah's Wall

Remnants of a wall dating back to the time of Nechemiah have apparently been discovered in an archeological dig in Jerusalem's ancient City of David.

In the Book of Nechemiah (6:16) it is recorded that this wall around the city to which Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity was completed in only 52 days, despite the threats of hostile neighbors who had occupied the area around Jerusalem.



This part of the two and a half millennia-old wall is located outside *Sha'ar Ha'ashpatot* (Dung Gate) and the Old City walls facing the Mount of Olives. Based on rich pottery found during a dig under a previously uncovered tower which had hitherto been assumed to date back to the Hasmonean period, it is now assumed that the tower was part of the wall built centuries before by Nechemiah.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and for cursing parents, judges and leaders; financial responsibilities for damaging people or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense of a person being robbed.

Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Usury is forbidden and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish

People must be holy, even concerning food. The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbat and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot — we are to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of laws with a law of kashrut — not to mix milk and meat.

G-d promises that He will lead the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, helping them conquer its inhabitants, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that G-d says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain to remain there for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

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BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

Birthdays – Part 2: Jewish Customs

From: Robert

*Dear Rabbi,
Does Judaism place any importance on birthdays, and are any considered to be more important than others?*

Dear Robert,

In the first installment we saw that according to Torah sources, birthdays generally can, and perhaps should, be commemorated and celebrated. In this installment I'll explore whether certain birthdays are more important than others, and what may be uniquely Jewish ways to observe birthdays.

Based on the aforementioned special *mazal* influence which is operative on a person's birthday, the great Sephardic Chacham Rabbi Chaim Palaggi writes that one should give extra *tzedaka* on his birthday because the increased *mazal* of the day will increase the impact of good deeds on his personality and character (Tzedakah L'Chaim). The Arvei Nachal (Parshat Shemini) writes that when a person focuses his efforts on a particular positive character trait on his birthday, G-d provides extra help to perpetuate that effort (Sefer Minhag Yisrael Torah p. 264).

Several sources mention various birthdays of special significance. The Chatam Sofer (Torat Moshe, Parshat Vayera) claims that Avraham made an annual celebration for Isaac on the anniversary of his *brit milah*. In fact, the Ben Ish Chai (Re'eh 17) composed a special prayer for this occasion.

The 12th and 13th birthday of a girl or boy, respectively, marking the commencement of mitzvah observance according to Torah law, are also singled out for celebration. True, regarding the *bat mitzvah*, Rav Moshe Feinstein states that it is merely a glorified birthday party and thus only a *seudat reshut* (Iggrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:104). However, Rav Ovadia Yosef, in addressing this comment of Rav Feinstein, writes that a *bat mitzvah* is indeed a special occasion when we celebrate a person's obligation in *mitzvot*. Furthermore, he writes that even if it were nothing more than a birthday party, it would still be a *seudat mitzvah* if words of Torah are recited (Yabia Omer, Orach Chaim 6:29).

The Talmud (Mo'ed Katan 28a) relates that the Sage Rav Yosef made a celebration upon attaining the age of sixty because he "outlived" the age of *karet*. Since this

indicates that a 60th birthday is a cause for celebration, the Kaf HaChaim writes that one should recite the *she'hechyanu* blessing on a new fruit in honor of this milestone birthday. Similarly, Chavot Yair (Responsa 70) writes that one should make a special meal and recite *she'hechyanu* on his 70th birthday since he has reached what the Sages consider to be a full life. Indeed, it is told of Rav Yakov Yosef Herman *zt"l* that he celebrated turning 70 for this reason.

The Ben Ish Chai (Re'eh 17) records the custom to celebrate a birthday every year, accompanied by Torah learning and mitzvah observance, and comments that it is a good custom that he followed in his own family. Rav Moshe Feinstein reportedly insisted that each of his grandchildren call him on his birthday to wish him well. Ginzei Yosef (4) writes that it is a good custom to recite a *she'hechyanu* over a new fruit or a new garment on all of one's birthdays. Rav Ovadia Yosef also notes that on any of one's birthdays it is appropriate to have a special meal accompanied by words of Torah, and that such a meal would be a *seudat mitzvah* (Yabia Omer, Orach Chaim 6:29).

The K'tav Sofer considered one's birthday to be a time for strengthening Torah learning and for personal reflection. On his 50th birthday he celebrated by making a public *siyum* on Tractate Pesachim and "thanking G-d for bringing me to this point in my life, and for giving me the strength to learn and teach Torah" (Yoreh De'ah 148). On his 54th birthday, a student found him despondent because, as he explained, he then began to "judge" himself (the Hebrew word for "judge", *dan*, has a *gematria* of 54), and felt that he had not accomplished what he should have at that point in life (Kuntrus Ohel Leah, printed at the beginning of K'tav Sofer on the Torah).

Rav Shmuel Salant, in honor of his seventieth and eightieth birthdays, donated the amount of coins corresponding to his age to *tzedakah* (Sefer Hakatan v'Hilchotav, ch. 84). A birthday is also a special opportunity to respect others and show them that they are appreciated. In this light, the Tiferet Yisrael insisted that his children write notes of *mazal tov* to each other on their birthdays (Aparkasta d'Anyah 123). The modern-day version of this would be to send a birthday card, and thereby fulfill the mitzvah of "loving others as oneself".

• Sources: *A Jewish Perspective on Birthdays*,
Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

Forever and Ever

The Torah (Ex. 21:6) teaches that if a Hebrew bondsman opts to continue with his master after his initial seven-year indenture, then “his master should pierce his (the slave’s) ear with an awl and he will be his slave forever (*le’olam*).” In general, the term *le’olam* means “forever”. However, in this case Rashi explains that *le’olam* is limited to the end of the fifty-year Jubilee cycle, at which time the bondsman is automatically emancipated. Sometimes the word *le’olam* is accompanied with other, seemingly synonymous words. To be more precise, sometimes the word *le’olam* is paired with the words *netzach*, *selah*, or *va’ed*. Based on this, the Talmud (*Eruvin* 54a) asserts that those words also mean “forever”. What is the logic behind the Talmud’s assertion, and are all of these words truly synonyms?

Rashi understands the logic behind this assertion is simply based on the fact that those words appear alongside *le’olam*, so they must all mean the same thing. Indeed, the early grammarian Rabbi Menachem ibn Saruk (920-970) writes in his lexicon of the Hebrew language, known as *Machaberet Menachem*, that the words *netzach*, *selah*, *olam*, and *va’ed* are all synonymous. They all mean “forever.” Rabbi Yosef Kimchi (father of Radak) makes the same assertion in his work *Sefer HaGilui*, except that he omits the word *selah* from this list (see below).

However, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), also known as the Maharsha, takes a different approach. As we saw in the case of the Hebrew bondsman, the word *le’olam* does not really mean “forever” in the sense of something which continues without limit. Rather, the word *le’olam* denotes a very long period of time, but nonetheless has an end point. That said, when the word *le’olam* is paired with the words *netzach*, *selah*, or *va’ed*, those words must add some meaning to the amount of time denoted by the word *le’olam* (because otherwise the dual wording would be superfluous). From this, the Talmud derives that the words *netzach*, *selah*, and *va’ed* must refer to a greater length of time than the word *olam* does, concluding that those words mean “forever”. Rabbi Avraham ben Ezriel of Vienna (a 13th century authority on liturgy) confines the Talmud’s assertion to instances where these three

words appear alongside the word *olam*, but the Maharsha understands that the Talmud means to extrapolate the meaning of those words in all instances.

In the blessing recited immediately before the Shema in the mornings, we ask of G-d, “And Your mercy and Your kindness shall not forsake us forever (*netzach*), forever (*selah*), and forever (*va’ed*).” Rabbi Avraham ben Natan HaYarchi (a 12th Provencal scholar) and Abudraham (a 14th century commentator to the Siddur) write that because of the redundancy in this prayer, one should omit the words *netzach* and *selah*, and only say the word *va’ed*. However, Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhab (a 14th century halachic decider) writes that we use synonymous words to convey the concept of “forever” in order to stress that we truly request His mercy and kindness to be everlasting.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) writes that although all four words in question mean “forever,” each emphasizes a slightly different idea. He argues that the word *netzach* implies something which is continuous (i.e. unchanging permanence), *selah* denotes something which is continual (i.e. ever-repeating), and *ad/va’ed* refers to the concept of infinite duration. That is, the word *ad* literally means “until,” but when left as a hanging preposition implies an ellipsis, as if to say, “until... (a time which cannot be defined).”

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) explains that the word *olam* is related to the word *al* (“on top”), because the entire purpose of existence is for each element of creation to strive to attain the spiritual level *above* where it is presently holding. To that effect, the entire world (*olam*) or the entire span of time (*olam*) serves as the game board upon which this can be played out. In this way, the entire space-time continuum serves as the playing field for rising above one’s current state. (Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) also explains that the word *ne’elam* (“hidden”) is related to the word *al*, because it is “above” one’s range of perception, so it is hidden from him.)

Based on this, Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that the Jubilee year is called *le’olam* because during that year

Continued on page ten

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

A Story Bears Fruit

Oh, the complexities of Jewish prayer! Praying in Hebrew, saying words chosen for us, searching for a minyan, lengthy prayers, complex laws of prayer — and more. These things make it easy to lose sight of what prayer is all about. In three simple words — *Rachmana liba ba’ei*, the Merciful One desires the heart — our Sages remind us what, above all, G-d truly desires. Prayer is a bond of love between G-d and us with a magical ingredient that is one that only G-d can measure.

A Story: Around five hundred years ago, a young man, a child of *anusim*, fled Spain. In his desire to return to his Jewish roots he found his way to the Land of Israel, to the city of Safed, and to the *Beit Midrash* of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi, known as the holy “Arizal,” where he found the congregation praying. He too began to pray.

“Dear G-d!” he cried, “I do not know the prayers! I do not know Hebrew! I only know the letters of the *alef-beit*. Please, take these letters and make them into the most beautiful prayers for You!” And he began reciting, over and over again, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

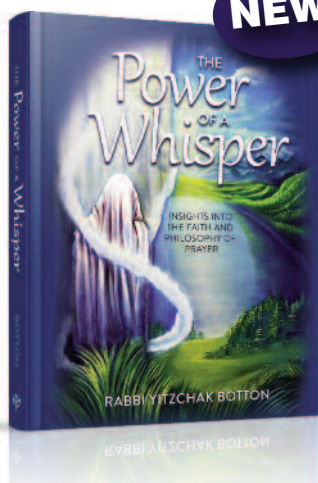
That night, the Arizal had a revelation that the Jewish People were saved from a harsh decree in the

merit of the prayer of one of his congregants. Upon investigation the Arizal discovered that it was not the prayer of one of his holy, scholarly disciples, but rather the simple prayer of that humble, brokenhearted young man.

One Rosh Hashana eve, Rabbi Eli Mintz of Monsey found himself leading the prayers in the Ukrainian city of Lvov (Lemberg). It was just after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the first time in close to a century that the town’s people were able to pray in the local synagogue. Hoping to touch hearts deprived for so long of what it felt like to be a Jew, Rabbi Mintz chose to tell a version of the above *alef-beit* story attributed to the early Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. When he concluded, an old man cried out, “I want to say the *alef-beit*!” Another person shouted, “I want to say it, too, but I don’t know how!”

Instead of opening the services with the traditional prayers, Rabbi Mintz began teaching everyone the *alef-beit*, letter by letter. The congregation repeated after him, calling out each letter with all their heart. This is how they prayed that Rosh Hashana eve.

• Source: “*The Power of a Whisper*”



NEVER UNDERESTIMATE

THE Power OF A Whisper

INSIGHTS INTO THE FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY OF PRAYER

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

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BY RABBI YOSEF HERSHMAN

Social Justice

The Torah opens its discussion of social legislation with the law of the thief who must sell himself as a servant, and for good reason. From the “exception to a rule” we can learn a great deal about the rule.

This case of the thief is the sole instance in which the Torah imposes loss of freedom as a punishment. Apart from the occasional detention before trial, there is no such thing as a prison sentence in Jewish law. The only institution that resembles a prison sentence is this thief’s servitude. But even here, his sentence hardly resembles punishment. He is to be placed with a family, and the law is careful to protect his dignity. Neither is he to be given degrading work, nor lesser provisions than the master of the household. He is treated as a brother, not an underling. The Torah also ensures that his family remains intact. They are not to suffer distress because of his offense and its consequences. If he is married, his wife and children join him, and their care is the master’s responsibility. In depriving him of his freedom, and thus the ability to provide for his family, the Torah imposes that responsibility on those who benefit from his labor.

Prison sentences as we know them — with all of their attendant degradation and misery for the prisoner, his wife and his children — have no place in Torah.

But we still may ask: Why in this single case of the thief, does the Torah deprive him of freedom? A thief is liable for the value of the theft and a punitive fine, but he may be sold only if he does not have sufficient

funds to pay the value of the theft, not for any statutory fine. In order for him to make this restitution, the law requires him to pay with his working capacity if he has no assets. Yet, in other cases where restitution is required for damage caused, this law does not apply — the offender does not lose his freedom in order to pay restitution. Why is the thief the exception?

Perhaps the reason is that the thief shows the most direct contempt for the idea of private property. Property ownership presupposes a level of public trust. If we cannot trust our neighbors, we could only “own” that which we could nail down. The thief, more than taking what is not his, undermines the public trust, the foundation of community. Other offenders who have damaged property are not required to forfeit their liberty to pay restitution, but because the thief has damaged this core value of society, he is required to pay with any means possible — even his very freedom.

His freedom is mortgaged only for six years; he goes free in the seventh. Six always represents the physical, material world, created in six days. Seven represents the spiritual, transcendent realm. The thief is to serve for six years, to rectify his having been sold to materialism, oblivious to the One above. By subordinating his physical existence for six years, he learns to recapture the element of the “seventh,” and having done so, is free to rejoin society. We are now confident that instead of breaching communal trust, he will contribute to it.

• Sources: *Commentary, Shemot 21: 6*

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BY RABBI ZE'EV KRAINES

“Iron Dome” Mezuzah Covers

Q: I've been reading your Ohrnet column and you write that if we had questions we should email you. I get email offers to purchase mezuzah cases fashioned from the metal fragments of “Iron Dome” missiles. I am thinking of purchasing one, but I want to make sure there are no issues. — Todd from NYC

A: Your question is fascinating, and it resonates with our very real obligation to express our gratitude to G-d for the miraculous survival of Israel and to show our solidarity with our people in their distress.

Interestingly, there is a tradition that the Baal Shem Tov cautioned against iron covers because of iron's association with war, and consequently some communities have a custom not to use iron and steel covers. This custom is based on the Torah's prohibition against sculpting the stones of the Holy Altar (that “prolong life”) with metal instruments (that “cut it short”). Others avoid covers made of any metal.

However, common practice follows the classical authorities who do not apply this analogy to mezuzah covers and allow all materials, including iron. Thus, unless one is a member of those communities who are strict in this matter, there would be no objective halachic prohibition against using the missile scrap.

But here's where the issue becomes subjective and nuanced. On the one hand, one could suggest that even according to the lenient approach, perhaps making a cover specifically out of a weapon of war is not appropriate. Yet, on the other hand, if the cover is meant to celebrate G-d's protection, by accentuating the defensive aspect of the iron dome, perhaps it is

not to be taken as a symbol of aggression, but of Divine providence. In other words, “Is it a sword or a shield?”

There is a further subtlety as well. Does the symbol indeed communicate that G-d is the protector of Israel, or does it mean to say that Israeli technology and Jewish brains are our protector? Indeed, one online seller advertises:

Protect your home with mezuzot from Sederot! Own a handmade mezuzah cover, made from fragments of the Iron Dome that protected and continues to protect Sederot and all the People of Israel!

Bottom line, I am not aware of any authority who allows iron and steel covers yet forbids “Iron Dome” fragments. Considering the ambiguity of the symbol, I would suggest that a person who purchases one should be clear that his intention is to express his gratitude for G-d's miracles and his solidarity with the People of Israel.

• Sources: *Da'as Kedoshim* 289:1; *Sha'arei HaMezuzah* 16:2; *Rav Ovadiah of Bartenura, Keilim* 16:7; *Maharil Chadashos* 122; *Aruch HaShulchan* 286:5; *Yafeh Eleiv* 3:289:1

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What's In a Word...continued from page six

a slave rises above his lower status and attains the same status of his master, that of a freedman. He also explains that the word *netzach* is also related to this concept because the word *netzach* is derived from the word *tzach* (“pristine” or “pure”), which alludes to the ultimate state of being which the soul yearns to achieve. The word *selah* is related to the word *suleh* (Job 28:16), which denotes something of higher value, and the word *va’ed* is related to the word *adi'im* (“adornments”), which alludes to the eternal ornaments which will adorn the soul in the World-to-Come.

Before we conclude this article, I would like to focus a bit on the word *selah*. As mentioned above, the Talmud (*Eruvin* 54a) explains that the word *selah* denotes something which continues *ad infinitum*. Based on this, Rashi, Meiri, and other classical commentators (to Psalms 3:3) explain that *selah* means “forever”. Indeed, the earliest translations of the Bible (Targum Yonatan in Aramaic, Aquilas in Greek, and the Peshitta in Syriac) all consistently translate *selah* as “forever”.

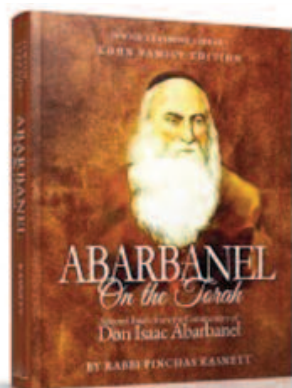
However, there are other ways of looking at the word *selah*. Radak (to Psalms 3:3 and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Malbim (to Psalms 3:3 and Habakuk 3:3) explain that *selah* is an interjection which marks the end of an idea (similar to an exclamation point in English!). Radak further explains that

selah serves as a musical note and indicates that one reading/chanting/singing the passage in question should raise one’s voice to denote the end of an idea. (Rabbi Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea (1680-1749) in *Emunat Chachamim* criticizes Radak for seemingly rejecting the traditional rabbinic interpretation of *selah* as “forever”. However, Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) defends Radak by explaining that there is a difference between the plain meaning, which Radak offered, and the deeper implication, which tradition provides.) Malbim adds that sometimes it also means to separate the main content of a passage from that which is only meant parenthetical. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (1923-1986) adds that the word *selah* means that we have just concluded relaying an important idea, and one should pause and contemplate that which he has just said before continuing.

Rabbi Mecklenburg cites one of the earlier commentators who apparently wrote that *Selah* is actually one of G-d’s names. Ibn Ezra (to Psalms 3:3) writes that the word *selah* serves to affirm that whatever has been said is true. Accordingly, *selah* means something like “this is true”, “so it is”, or “it is correct”. True that!

Eiluy Nishmat my mother Bracha bat R’ Dovid
and my grandmother Shprintza bat R’ Meir

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