

A New Yavneh Publication

15 February 2008

Obscure Halacha

How Frum are You?

By Yoni Friedman

So I was reading through Parshas Kedoshim during my shana bet, and I found what I thought was a strange mitzvah. The pasuk says, (God speaking - or P, according to most of you reading this) “You shall not eat over the blood; you shall not practice divination and you shall not believe in lucky times” (19:26). Lucky times? I thought that was pretty weird. I mean, there are many instances where we say it’s bad luck to get married or to start a journey on this day or that day.

So I asked Rabbi Donny Wolf, who Rabbi Moshe Taragin says is brighter than Rav Aharon (heresy to some people who, well, probably aren’t reading this), and he agreed that we seemingly violate this mitzvah all the time. He began to show me other, more obscure examples. In the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 179:2, it says that one should not get married except under a full moon. It’s true - you can look it up (ask Jake where the beis medrash is if you’ve forgotten how to get there). Under a full moon? Really? Wasn’t the Ramban concerned about werewolf attacks? Or was he himself a werewolf who wanted to keep people occupied during his werewolvian excursions?

Perhaps, but he does bring sources. His discussion (brought down in the Bais Yosef, same siman) focuses on gemaras in Sanhedrin 66:A and Shabbos 156:B. In Sanhedrin, he brings a few stories where major Rabbis like Rabbi Akiva seemingly believe in astrology. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak actually says that the stars hold the truth about all future events, only every now and then Hashem will perform a miracle for those who fear Him “to nullify the decree of the stars.” The Ramban himself says that if one sees in the stars that he’s going to have a bad day, one should guard himself and not tempt fate. The moon comes up because of a gemara in Shabbos which says that if you were born during a time of the week that corresponds to the moon, then it’s a siman that you will build and destroy things. I’m not sure what that has to do with anything - but he goes on to say that the moon carries very strong “mazel,” or luck, and so you should get married only under a full moon.

The Rambam, on the other hand, calls this “divrei hevel v’shtus” - “stupid and stupid” - and says that anyone who believes in this is considered amongst the ranks of “women and simpletons.”

Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	5:20 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	5:10 PM
Saturday Maariv	6:25 PM

Announcements

- Kiddush this week is sponsored by Shula Gross in honor of Giovanni Oppenheim’s new baby. (Mazeltov!) Kiddush last week was sponsored by Sam Cohen. Thanks to all our sponsors.
- This Friday night at 8 PM the CJL there will be the second annual Jeff Pomeranz Memorial Lecture, given by Dr. Jane Kanarek, a professor of Talmud and halakhah at Hebrew College. The lecture is titled “Recalibrating the World: Another Look at Tikkun ha-Olam.”
- This Saturday night, the Princeton men’s basketball team faces Brown in Jadwin Gym at 7:30 PM. Talk to Daniel Mark if you re interested in going as part of a Yavneh group.
- Also this Saturday night, at 9 PM in Theatre Intime, the improv comedy group Quipfire! is doing a show. Yavneh reserved 8 tickets, some of which are still left. The cost if \$5. Talk to Greg Burnham if you’re interested in going.

Things to Anticipate

- On the evening of Thursday March 6th, Rabbi Menachem Leibtag will be giving a shiur at Princeton titled “Why Judaism is a ‘Catholic Marriage’ - Tracing the Biblical concept of Covenant.” Mark your calendars! The dinner may be free for upperclassmen and grad students - we’re working on it.
- Yavneh on Ice! We’re still looking into renting out Baker Rink for an evening of ice-skating.
- A Shabbaton with another university. Details to come.
- Olam Ha-Ba. I hear it’s gonna be good.

A Quick Thought

By Rabbi Josh Ross

There is a very interesting *sugya* in Gemarrah *Sukkah* which tries to ascertain where we get the minimum measurement of 10 *tfakim* for a *sukkah*. During the discussion the Gemarrah turns to the clothing of the Kohen Gadol and our parsha and asks how small the headpiece was, and if we can use its size to figure out the minimum *shiur* of the *sukkah*. In this *sugya* we are introduced to the halachic concept of “*tefasta merubah lo tefasta, tefasta meuta tefasta*,” which means “if you seize too much you have seized nothing, but if you seize a little you have seized something.” Of course the point is, if you reduce something to the bare minimum you know it can’t be smaller, but go for something bigger, and you could be way off. To me this is a funny kind of concept. The truth is, I think this concept actually makes a great deal of sense and can be applied equally to life and measurements. What do I mean? I know, you’re all thinking “Rabbi Ross is going to be mean to me. Again.” I’m really not.

As I see the semester start I see all these plans and dreams students have. You know: “I’m going to go to the gym for three hours in the morning, learn for nine hours, do charitable deeds, and take 11 classes.” (This last one only unreasonable if you aren’t Phil.) Whenever I hear this, I am reminded of *tefasta merubah lo tefasta* and something my Rabbi once told me. He said everyone who wakes up and says I’m going to make it to every *minyán* and *daven* with *cavana* every time and learn 20 hours a day - you might think it’s their *yetzer tov* talking. It’s not - it’s really their *yetzer hara*. Because the *yetzer hara* knows that if it gets you to plan the impossible, then you will get frustrated with failing in one thing and give up on everything. I know so many people who have one bad diet day and give up, or have one bad *shacharit* week and say there is no point in trying. The simple truth is, if you seize on something small - even if it is small - you will succeed for sure. And when it becomes routine, you can move on to the next thing. You don’t have to make big excuses, just small successes. And if you don’t succeed right away, you won’t reject everything, you’ll just struggle with the newest thing.

So this semester, unless you’re Jake, don’t say you’re going to learn 15 hours a day. Try saying you’ll learn something for an hour a day. Unless you’re Yoni, don’t say you’ll make every *minyán*. How about every *shacharit*? Ok, for some of you maybe every

mincha? Ok, how about making any *minyán* once this week? I know this may not sound like the best message for the hyper-achieving Princeton student, but I’m not saying don’t do what you know you can. I’m not saying don’t dream. I am simply saying make sure you can accomplish what you set out to accomplish. After all, we saw in last week’s *parsha* that the *mishkan* was built on the donations of the nation. No one person donated the whole thing. It wasn’t called the Bronfman Tabernacle, or the Wilf Ark. The Kohen Gadol didn’t have a *ketonet* sponsored by Dougie’s and a Red Bull *mitznephet*. Rather, these amazing creations were built from small contributions by everyone. So many times in our history we see that it is on the basis of each small contribution, each one alone not so helpful, that so much is built.

Shabbat Shalom, and remember this semester to make sure all those exciting big plans are coming from the *yetzer tov*.

A Taste of History

Anecdotes from Yavneh’s Past

By Toby Robison

Once, on an ordinary Saturday, we made Kiddush before the Torah reading. Here’s how it happened.

It was summer, and very few people were around. We just managed *minyanim* for a few Shabbat services. Then came a week when only four of us were in town. We all decided to come to services anyway, because - you never know - a visitor might have shown up, and at least we could offer a visitor a meal.

We arrived to find SIX male visitors. No one had prepared the Torah reading, but one of us, a post-doc, was a good reader. “Give me ten minutes,” he said, “and I’ll be okay. Make kiddush first.” So we did. (No wine, of course.)

Here at Princeton, that’s what we mean by “Miracle *Minyan*.”

Want to Write?

Have a good idea for a column? Email Greg Burnham (gburnham@) if you are interested in writing for this publication. We’ll publish most anything relating to Judaism or Judaism at Princeton.