

A New Yavneh Publication

27 Nissan 5768 // 2 May 2008

Obscure Halacha

How Frum are You?

By Jeff Mensch

So, Zahava managed to push me into writing another one of these Obscure Halacha columns. Bad move, especially during the Omer. Why? Because I don't like it. In case you haven't heard me rant against it yet:

1. As many of you know, the Midrash (it probably appears in the Gemara, but I don't know the source) states that 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's talmidim died during the Omer. However, it seems that they died through the 33rd of the Omer, *i.e.* they no longer died on the 34th, while we celebrate Lag (33rd) BaOmer. Why? Well, Lag BaOmer is also traditionally the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, to whom Rabbi Moses de Leon ascribed the authorship of the Zohar, the foremost work of the KABBALAH.
2. This shaving thing. Apparently you can't do it. My face is getting really itchy and I don't like it. Why? Well, the Rishonim say that you can't cut your hair, so apparently this extends to shaving. Fortunately, if I remember correctly, Rabbi Soloveitchik ruled that since not shaving is frowned upon in modern culture, and the Omer has the laws of the period of the year of mourning after a death (one normally doesn't shave only during the shloshim period), one should only shave when necessary to not be looked down upon, which he says is every two days in America. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach did not agree, but nevertheless ruled that one can shave for Shabbos. Oh, Shabbos! You relieve my itchy face!
3. The Tur rules that women have a minhag not to work after dark, with which the Shulchan Aruch concurs. The reason is that people were burying the dead during that time, and thus they were not working. Don't ask me why only the women have this law, especially when it was probably the men who were burying the dead. But since all of the Omer is a minhag, that means you ladies better do it, as you can't just pick and choose which of the laws of the Omer to keep.

I could try to keep on going, but I feel that I have ranted long enough. Enjoy your Shabbos and your no-longer-itchy face.

A Taste of History

Anecdotes from Yavneh's Past

By Jeff Gluck, Yavneh Alum

Stevenson Hall actually was two buildings. 83 Prospect was where the kosher kitchen and Yavneh offices were, while 91 Prospect had a non-kosher dining hall (also University-run). Both were "Stevenson Hall College," and members of the kosher kitchen were members of both. After some debate, Yavneh decided to put up an eruv around the back of both buildings (there was concern about people bringing things back and forth between the buildings). Someone was appointed to check the eruv every week. That person came to be known as the Minister of De-fence.

Announcements

- Kiddush this week is sponsored by Yavneh. If you are interested in sponsoring a Kiddush, please contact Mendy Fisch (mendy@princeton.edu).
- Rabbi Ross will give a shiur after kiddush before lunch this Saturday morning. It will rock as much as usual, if not more so.

Things to Anticipate

- Next Shabbat is senior Shabbat! There will be a special oneg for the seniors, upstairs in the CJL after dinner. The freshmen will present gifts to the seniors, who will give brief reflections on their time here. Come have fun and say goodbye!
- Not only the seniors, but also the Rosses and the Solomons won't be here next year - and we're very sad about that. There will be numerous farewell events going on in the coming weeks. Stay tuned.

Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	6:20 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	7:30 PM
Saturday Maariv	8:47 PM

A Quick Thought

By Rabbi Josh Ross

With so many easy *mussar* targets in the parsha this week, it is a veritable treasure trove of happiness for a Rabbi who has to put out a quick thought every week. Do I want to talk about Shabbat? Honoring your parents (good job Jordan)? Charity? *Giluy arayot*? So many options, all of them so applicable to the Princeton student.

The truth is, of all of them I want to look specifically at the pasuk of *lifnei iver*: “[you shall not place a stumbling block] before the blind.” (Vayikra 19:14) While (ironically) there is some debate about whether or not this pasuk is to be taken literally, we certainly see that everyone takes it allegorically. Ultimately I think that, although most people don’t consider it this way, the issur of *lifnei iver* is a problem we all deal with almost every day and need to think about more often.

On the most basic level the gemarrah in Avodah Zarah explains that this prohibition keeps us from aiding anyone in sinning. The classic example is providing a nazir with wine, assuming the nazir can’t get it any other way. Even though at first blush you yourself are doing nothing wrong, the Torah comes to teach us that helping someone do something wrong is *assur*. Not only that, but *mefarshim* make it clear that this issur applies even when it comes to intangible advice. The classic example given by the Sifra is giving someone advice so you can benefit from their mistakes — encouraging someone to sell their field and buy a donkey, but only so you can really get their field at a low price. What I would suggest is that also simply encouraging someone to do something you know to be stupid or against their better interests puts you over on the issur, even if you don’t gain directly. Obviously I am not talking about well-intended advice that doesn’t pan out — accidents happen. I mean if you tell someone to take another drink when you know it’s going to put them over the edge but you think it’s hilarious; or encouraging someone to become a Yankee fan, for example.

If you really consider this prohibition it is pretty incredible. As a matter of fact it gets even more interesting when we look at the mishna in the same gemarrah Avodah Zarah. In the mishna we are told that we may not have business dealings with idol worshippers before their holidays. The reason that the gemarra gives is that you will cause the idol worshipper to praise their false deity, causing them to sin. So what? Well — according to the gemarra you

also sin through *lifnei iver* because it is prohibited for a non-Jew to engage in idol worship. So we see the prohibition of *lifnei iver* applies to helping a Jew and non-Jew sin, or giving bad advice to a Jew or a non-Jew. That’s pretty intense, considering how few biblical prohibitions apply to non-Jews.

Nehama Leibowitz offers the widest extension of the law:

But the Torah teaches us that even by sitting at home doing nothing, by complete passivity and divorcement from society, one cannot shake off responsibility for what is transpiring in the world at large, for the iniquity, violence and evil there. By not protesting, “not marking the graves” and danger spots, you have become responsible for any harm arising therefrom, and have violated the prohibition: “Thou shalt not put a stumbling block before the blind.”

How she puts it is not insignificant, and I think if you examine your own life you will see that you could probably do a great deal to improve on how you relate to this. Think about it — I am not some social justice type person. I don’t think we all need a group hug. But I do think we are dealing with a *dorita* that cannot be ignored. According to everyone it applies to Jews and non-Jews alike. That means everyone in this world. Think about it. What are you allowing to happen that you could be stopping? What are you not protesting? In general I think most people get the idea of not aiding a sinner in their sin. I would not buy cigarettes for someone who could not get them otherwise, or pour a drink for a nazir if I was the only bar in town. I think what gets lost in the shuffle is that this is an *issur* that can be viewed as having a far-reaching impact. It is something we should all think about more often and try and see how it applies to our lives, and how often we may be laible.

Want to Write?

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