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PARASHAH

BRINGING JEWS BACK

Wisdom for Living by Rabbi Nechemia Cooper Smith

This week's *parashah* singles out the *meisis* — someone who entices a Jew to worship idols — with the harshest treatment of any transgressor in the Torah. The Rambam (*Hilchos Sanhedrin* 11:5) summarizes five highly unusual directives that pertain to the laws of a *meisis* and no one else, including allowing witnesses to hide in order to observe him, he does not need to be warned beforehand, and the court does not argue in his defense, and judges who are less likely to show mercy are chosen.

The same Torah whose fundamental principle is "Love your fellow as yourself" obligates us to show no mercy toward the *meisis* and to aggressively seek his conviction and execution.

Rav Aharon Kotler, in *Mishnas Rav Aharon* (vol. 1, p. 254), derives the following insight from the unique laws regarding a *meisis*.

Our sages teach us that Hashem's desire to bestow reward is 500 times greater than His desire to punish. This is derived from the *passuk* in *Shemos* (34:7, see Rashi there) that says that punishment can be extended only to the fourth generation, while reward can be extended for 2000 generations.

Consequently, explains Rav Aharon, if a *meisis* is considered the worst transgressor of all and as a result is treated more severely than even an idolater or murderer, the opposite of a *meisis* — namely, a *mekarev*, one who brings Jews back to Torah — must be the most righteous person of all, and will be rewarded 500 times more than the *meisis* is punished.

It is important to note how stringent the Torah's criteria for a *meisis* are. If someone would tell the *gadol hador*, "Bow down to a telephone pole because it will answer your prayers," and the *gadol* would dismiss him outright, saying, "You're a *meshuganer*, get out of here!" the person is still considered a *meisis*, even though his words had no impact. The mere attempt

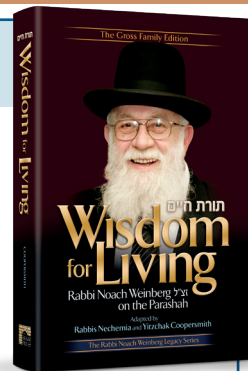
to draw a person away from Torah categorizes someone as a *meisis*.

Many people who dedicate their lives to *kiruv* mistakenly believe that their efforts on behalf of their fellow Jews are significant only if the person they are working with becomes *shomer Shabbos*. That is certainly a great achievement, but it's not what confers upon a person the lofty and cherished status of a *mekarev*. If a person is considered a *meisis* just by virtue of his attempt to draw someone away from *Yiddishkeit*, then a person who attempts to draw someone to *Yiddishkeit* must be considered a *mekarev* by virtue of the undertaking alone.

Just taking the initiative to try and reconnect a fellow Jew to *Yiddishkeit* is deemed by Hashem to be the greatest good, and worthy of the greatest reward. The actual impact we have on another Jew is secondary.

Someone who tries to lead one Jew astray is attempting to move the world further away from Hashem; he is creating a *chillul Hashem*. This is in contradistinction to someone who tries to bring one Jew closer to his Father in Heaven. The latter is attempting to increase the awareness of Hashem in the world, and just making the effort creates a *kiddush Hashem*. If he actually succeeds, then how much greater is his achievement. This is true for reaching just one Jew; how much more does it apply to someone who is making a genuine effort to impact all of *Klal Yisrael*, to reach the entire Jewish people!

People naturally share the things they love. What will compel us to reach out to our fellow Jews is our genuine love, excitement, and appreciation for the Almighty and the wisdom of his Torah. To the extent that we love Hashem and Torah, we will be driven to share this love. 📖



When Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment, draws steadily closer, we begin to wonder if we can still do *teshuvah* in such a short time.

The Gemara relates that a *chassan* on his wedding day is forgiven for all of his sins without even having to repent. On the surface, this seems bizarre. Why should anyone be granted atonement for his sins, without the need to do anything to merit forgiveness? If we understand how a *chassan* attains *mechilah*, we will be able to comprehend how we ourselves can secure forgiveness even in such a short amount of time.

For a human being, learning and development take place through the formation of habits. A child learns how to speak by making incomprehensible sounds and adjusting them until they become words. By repeating these sounds over and over, the child develops connections in his brain that solidify into the permanent ability to speak. And the same is true of all other learned skills. The power of habit to mold a person's tendencies is astonishing; scientists have discovered that a new skill can be learned by repeating an action between 7 and 21 times, while it takes between 1,500 and 2,000 repetitions of an action to correct a skill that was learned incorrectly. An old adage states, "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." The things that we do repeatedly have the power to shape our characters and become the very fabric of our personality. In short, our repeated actions make us who we are.

The *yetzer hara's* power lies in his ability to capitalize on this aspect of the human condition. The *yetzer hara* is known as a *zakein u'kesil*, an old and foolhardy man; he dwells in the past, constantly reminding us of our previous failures and never allowing us to transcend them. "Look at the *aveiros* you have done; whom

do you think you are fooling?" The *yetzer hara* seeks to trap us in the morass of our own past sins, turning them into a psychological prison that stymies our spiritual growth.

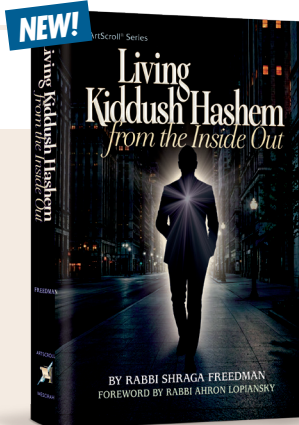
Teshuvah, then, is the process of making a fresh start and turning ourselves, in effect, into brand new people who are not defined or limited by their past mistakes. In short, *teshuvah* means breaking free of our old habits.

The *Sforno* at the end of *Parashas Mishpatim* explains that Moshe Rabbeinu had to spend 40 days on Har Sinai because that is the length of time it takes for an embryo to form — in other words, the length of time it takes to create a new being. When Moshe went up to Har Sinai, he became, in essence, a new creation, an angelic being whose face shone with *kedushah*. In order for that transformation to take place, he had to be there for 40 days.

Similarly, there are exactly 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur, for during this time, as well, the Jewish people undergo a process of rebirth.

When a person enters into marriage, he is essentially beginning an entirely new phase of life. Such a person is not limited or bound by his past actions; he naturally feels that anything he did previously has no bearing on his current reality. It is only natural, then, for such a person to be forgiven for his sins simply because he is now experiencing a new beginning.

The Brisker Rav explains that this is the very definition of the special gift of Rosh Hashanah: It is a day when a fresh start is handed to us, when we are freed from our past habits and become capable of transforming ourselves into new people. 📖



THE WEEKLY QUESTION

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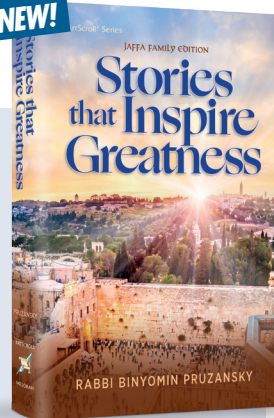
What are the two korbanos that everyone coming to Yerushalayim for Yom Tov is required to bring?

Kids, please ask your parents to email the answer to shabbosquestion@artscroll.com by this Wednesday to be entered into a weekly raffle to win a \$36 ARTSCROLL GIFT CARD! Be sure to include your full name, city, and contact info. Names of winners will appear in a future edition. HINT: The answer can be found in *The Jaffa Family Edition Weekly Parashah*.

The winner of the question for Mattos is: CHAVA STEIN, Ramat Bet Shemesh, Israel

Question for Mattos was: How many years did it take for the shevatim of Gad and Reuven to divide up the land?
Mattos Answer: Fourteen. 7 to conquer the land and 7 to divide it





Yosef was a real estate developer trying to close a major deal that would change his career. To do so, he had to secure funding from a specific bank in Texas. He arranged a flight from New York and set up an appointment with the bank manager for 4:00 p.m. sharp. As he prepared for the meeting, he realized he needed to catch a minyan for *Minchah*. The only available *minyan* in the area was at 3:45. He calculated that if he moved quickly, he could *daven* and still make the meeting just in time.

When he arrived at the shul, he found only seven other men. They waited anxiously, but the clock was ticking. Yosef knew that if he didn't leave immediately, he would miss the appointment, and the entire deal would fall through. Just as he turned to leave, two more men arrived, completing the *minyan*. But one of the newcomers, who had a *yahrzeit*, saw Yosef heading for the door and grabbed his arm. "Please," he pleaded, "if you leave now, we lose the minyan and I cannot say *Kaddish*. I really need you to stay."

Yosef was torn. He looked at the man's desperate face and thought: How can I let a fellow *Yid* down just to make a deal? He chose to stay.

Right after *Minchah*, he rushed to the bank, arriving at 4:30, thirty minutes late. His heart was sinking; he was sure the manager had already moved on. The secretary looked up and smiled. "Don't worry," she said, "the bank manager is actually running a little late himself."

A few moments later, the manager walked in. Yosef was stunned. It was none other than the man from the *minyan* who had begged him to stay for *Kaddish*.

When they sat down in the office, the manager looked at him with profound respect. "Listen, Yosef," he said. "A loan of this size usually takes months of red tape to be approved. But after seeing what you did today — how you were willing to risk your own business interests for my father's *yahrzeit* — I decided I had to be there for you. We are going to expedite this immediately." The loan application was reviewed and approved at record speed.

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (2:4) teaches, "*Asei retzono kirtzoncha, k'dei sheya'aseh retzoncha kirtzono* — Make His will like your will, so that He will make your will like His will." When you make His will your priority, He makes your needs His priority and takes care of your heart's desires. 📖

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	SHABBOS AUGUST 8 ב' אב	SUNDAY AUGUST 9 ג' אב	MONDAY AUGUST 10 ד' אב	TUESDAY AUGUST 11 ה' אב	WEDNESDAY AUGUST 12 ו' אב	THURSDAY AUGUST 13 ז' אב	FRIDAY AUGUST 14 ח' אב
BAVLI	Chullin 100	Chullin 101	Chullin 102	Chullin 103	Chulin 104	Chulin 105	Chulin 106
YERUSHALMI	Moed Katan 23	Yevamos 1	Yevamos 2	Yevamos 3	Yevamos 4	Yevamos 5	Yevamos 6
MISHNAH	Keilim 24:1-2	Keilim 24:3-4	Keilim 24:5-6	Keilim 24:7-8	Keilim 24:9-10	Keilim 24:11-12	Keilim 24:13-14
KITZUR	200:3-9	200:10-202:1	202:2-8	202:9-203:2	203:3-204:5	204:6-205:3	205:4-206:6
ORAYSA	Yevamos Chazara 91b-92b	Yevamos 93a Chazara 92b	Yevamos 93b Chazara 93a	Yevamos 94a Chazara 93b	Yevamos 94b Chazara 94a	Yevamos 95a Chazara 94b	Yevamos Chazara 93a-93ab

PART 22: THE TALMUD TAKES SHAPE

In 1989, the decision was made: With the creation of the Mesorah Heritage Foundation making fundraising possible—though by no means easy—we would attempt to fulfill Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky’s recommendation to undertake Talmud Bavli.

A great *talmid chacham* and experienced *maggid shiur*, R’ Hersh Goldwurm was uniquely qualified to lead the team and identify the many questions that required *daas Torah* guidance. With the enthusiastic encouragement and proactive involvement of the *gedolim*, each question was carefully addressed, and the project began to take shape.

First, we needed to answer three questions: how should the Gemara be “taught,” how should the page be designed, and who should write it.

The elucidation would have to be written from scratch—but how? The Talmud is so rich that it can be presented in many different ways, each of them potentially correct, so how will the *pshat* be taught? The *psak* was clear—the Gemara should be presented according to Rashi, and his brief yet clear commentary should be explained in depth, revealing the richness concealed within Rashi’s seeming simplicity.

How should the page be designed? Should each volume be divided into two sections, with the Vilna Shas *tzuras hadaf* appearing first and the ArtScroll elucidation presented separately afterward? It was decided that the elucidation should instead appear on facing pages of its *tzuras hadaf*. Our goal was never to replace the study of Gemara from the *tzuras hadaf*, but to encourage readers to focus on the original *tzuras hadaf*, and use the elucidation as an aid in developing the skills to learn independently. This layout meant that whenever a single *amud* required three, four, or even five pages of elucidation, the page

containing the *tzuras hadaf* would be repeated every time.

Regarding the page design, we were told that the translation should include brief introductory phrases and explanatory words woven throughout the translation itself, to help the learner follow the flow of the Gemara and understand its reasoning. Notes at the bottom of the page would explain the Gemara in depth and present sources for greater research.

A striking testament to the quality of the notes came when the Schottenstein Talmud was being prepared in Hebrew. R’ Elyashiv *zt”l*, who mastered Torah in its entirety, would review our notes while preparing a Gemara *shiur* he would deliver for *baalei batim*. In fact, we once received a call from his grandson asking whether the manuscript for Tractate *Bechoros* was available. The volume had not yet been published, but R’ Elyashiv wanted to review it before delivering his *shiur*. Needless to say, a large manila envelope filled with pages was soon on its way to his home.

Who should write and edit the work? We would need to assemble a large team of outstanding *talmidei chachamim* who were fluent in the language of the Talmud and its commentaries, thoroughly familiar with the learning style of mainstream yeshivos, and capable of writing clear, precise English. Each writer would also need to be a gifted teacher, able to present complex ideas clearly to scholars and laymen alike, and have to be willing to simplify his writing when necessary, always placing the reader’s understanding above the temptation to impress his colleagues. Not an easy combination. With much *siyata diShmaya*, a stellar staff was ultimately assembled—an extraordinary achievement that can only be described as a miracle. The foundation was now in place for a project that would transform the study of Gemara for generations to come.

UP NEXT: The Schottenstein Family, an Empire of Torah Support



R' Elyashiv