

# BROTHERS AND TEACHERS

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshas Reeh

## Brothers and Teachers

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*Sponsored by Nathan and Rikki Lewin on the yahrzeit of his father, Dr. Isaac Lewin (Harav Yitzchok ben Harav Aharon a"h)*

In the final paragraphs of our parashah, the Torah presents once again the laws of the festivals-- Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland and member of the Polish Senate; murdered in the Holocaust) explained in a derashah how the laws of Pesach set forth important principles for the fledgling Jewish nation to bear in mind. We present one example.

The Korban Pesach should be eaten in family groups and must be eaten indoors. One is not permitted to take any part of the flesh out-of-doors. This teaches us the importance of unity, privacy and discretion. As a nation, we should keep our internal matters private. They should not be aired in a public manner. Moreover, we must stick together.

R' Lewin notes that these lessons are demonstrated by our experience in Egypt. The Torah records in Parashat Shmot (2:11), "It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren." What does the last phrase, "of his brethren" add? Obviously we know that a Hebrew man was of Moshe's brethren. Rather, R' Lewin explains, the Torah is telling us why the Egyptian felt at liberty to hit the Jew. Why wasn't he afraid that someone would avenge the Jew's blood? It happened because "of his brethren," i.e., because the Egyptian knew that there were Jews who were traitors to the Jewish people. As soon as there are Jews who turn against their brethren or who fail to stand up for the honor of their brethren, the other nations know that they have a license to oppress us freely. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

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"If the place that Hashem, your Elokim, will choose to place His Name will be far from you, you may slaughter from your cattle and your flocks that Hashem has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat in your cities according to your heart's entire desire." (12:21)

The Gemara (Chullin 10b) records a custom that a shochet shows his knife to a Torah scholar before slaughtering an animal. The Gemara states that failing to do so does not render the animal that is slaughtered non-kosher; rather, the purpose of this custom is to honor Torah scholars.

Why is there such a custom? [There is no custom for a sofer to show his quill, or a mohel his knife, to a Torah scholar!] R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (186-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains:

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 99b) relates that the sage Rava had the following practice when an animal that had been slaughtered and found to be a potential treifah, i.e., it had a potentially life-threatening injury that would render it non-kosher, was brought before to him for examination. If he found that the animal was a treifah and therefore non-kosher, he would say, "I am prohibiting the meat of yonah [a kosher bird] to you." If he found that it was kosher, he would say, "I am permitting the meat of raven [a non-kosher bird] to you." Why did he do this? The Gemara explains that he was responding to heretics that ask, "What good have the rabbis done for us? They never allow us to eat ravens, nor have they ever prohibited a yonah!" [In this way, he was demonstrating the necessity to have Torah scholars who can interpret and apply the subtle laws of the Torah such as the laws of treifot.]

R' Kook concludes: Because these questions that arise from shechitah demonstrate the need to consult Torah scholars, our Sages wished to emphasize at the beginning of the shechitah process the necessity to show respect to Torah scholars. Therefore, shochtim show their knives to those scholars. This serves as a warning as well that a shochet should neither be too lenient in examining the animal he slaughters, nor too strict, for just as the sage Rava sometimes ruled that that which others thought was permitted was prohibited, other times he ruled that that which others thought was prohibited was permitted. (Zivchei Ra'ayah)

R' Moshe Feinstein z"l (1895-1986) offers another explanation for this custom. He writes: [The Shulchan Aruch Y.D., siman 242 sets forth rules for when one may pasken / issue a halachic ruling without permission from his teacher.] If the resolution is straightforward or widely known, that is not considered issuing a halachic ruling (Y.D. 242:8). However, a question that requires weighing two alternatives is the exclusive domain of an ordained Torah scholar.

On the one hand, examining a shochet's knife requires some degree of judgment and therefore should be reserved for a Torah scholar. On the other hand, since halachah presumes that most shochtim are competent, they should be deemed competent to examine the knife as well. In short, a Torah scholar is not technically needed for checking a knife, yet there are grounds to argue that he is needed. Therefore, to show him honor, it is customary to show the knife to a Torah scholar before

using it. But, if he is not available, the shechitah is valid nevertheless. (Dibrot Moshe: Chullin, he'arah 64)

Another reason for this custom may be the following:

The verse says, "You may slaughter from your cattle and your flocks that Hashem has given you, as I have commanded you." But there is no such mitzvah elsewhere in the Torah! Rashi z"l explains: "This teaches us that there was already a commandment regarding the slaughtering of animals given orally to Moshe on Har Sinai."

This is among the most obvious hints in the Torah to the existence of the Oral Law. And, since the Oral Law is the province of Torah scholars, the shochet shows honor to them when performing the mitzvah of shechitah by showing his knife to them. (Shamati)

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"If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you an ot / sign or a mofeit / wonder." (13:2)

R' Yosef Gikatilla z"l (1210-1348; Spain; author of the kabbalistic work Sha'arei Orah) writes: An "ot" is a change in the natural order which causes no harm, while a "mofeit" is a change that does cause harm.

We read in the Pesach Haggadah, "With otot [plural of ot]--this refers to the staff [of Moshe]." R' Gikatilla explains that this refers specifically to the staff turning into a snake, which harmed no one. We also read, "With moftim [plural of mofeit]--this is the [plague of] blood." This, writes R' Gikatilla, is shorthand for all of the plagues, which did cause harm. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tzofnat Paneach p.69)

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"When a prophet will arise among you . . ." (13:2)

The Gemara (Bava Batra 12a) teaches: "A wise man is greater than a prophet." R' Avraham son of the Rambam (1186-1237) explains: The prophet referred to by this statement is not one of the prophets of the 24 books of Tanach, for they were all wise men and women in addition to being prophets, and they were certainly greater than someone who is only wise, but not a prophet. Rather, this statement refers to the many people mentioned in Tanach who experienced prophecy briefly, although they were not necessarily wise (see Shmuel I 19:20-21). Why is a wise man superior to them? Because he does not need them, but they do need him; without the wise man's wisdom and Torah knowledge, these "part-time" prophets would have no inkling of what is expected of them in this world. Such a

prophet is even required to stand in the presence of a wise man, for there is no level higher than that of a Torah scholar. Knowledge of Torah is the ultimate purpose of creation, as Hashem told the prophet (Yirmiyahu 33:25), "If not for My covenant [being kept] day and night, I would not have created heaven and earth." For the same reason, even a king is required to have a Sefer Torah with him at all times. (Igrot R' Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, No. 7)

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## Elul

The Midrash Shocher Tov relates that when Moshe Rabbeinu learned about the mitzvot of vidui / confession and teshuvah / repentance, he composed Psalm 100, which begins, "Mizmor le'todah." (The word "todah," usually translated "thanksgiving," shares the same root as "vidui.") Psalm 100 instructs us, "Know that Hashem is Elokim. He made us, and we are 'lo'." The mesorah / tradition regarding the spelling and pronunciation of the Bible teaches that the word "lo" is spelled lamed-aleph but is read as if it was spelled lamed-vav. In other words, the phrase in the verse means, "We are His," but it is written as if it means, "We are not."

The midrash and the mesorah are providing us with a primer for teshuvah, writes R' Menachem Simcha Katz shlita (Brooklyn, NY). The first step in repenting is, "Know!" Reflect and know why Hashem created us. "Know that Hashem is Elokim; He made us" for a reason.

The next step is to realize that if you want to be "lo" (lamed-vav), i.e., "His," you must be "lo" (lamed-aleph), i.e., "Not." In other words, humility and a broken heart are essential to repentance.

In light of the above, we can understand the teaching of the Kabbalists that a "spark" of Moshe Rabbeinu's soul is given to a ba'al teshuvah. As mentioned above, da'at / knowledge is essential for teshuvah. Moshe is connected with da'at, as we see in the fact that our Sages refer to Moshe's generation as the "Dor De'ah" / "The Generation of Knowledge." (Simcha L'Ish p.122)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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