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PARSHA

ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Naso - Rabbi Shlomo Alexander

Out of the Bucket

In this week's *parshah*, Rashi comments on the sequence of two topics, asking why the *parshah* of *nazir* follows the *parshah* of *sotah*. Their proximity, Rashi explains, serves to teach us that anyone who sees a *sotah* in her shame should become a *nazir*. Although seeing a *sotah* is a *mitzvah* (as mentioned in the *Mishnah* in *Maseches Sotah*), nevertheless, one who views her shame must protect himself from the effects of this sight! This necessity underscores the importance of guarding ourselves from any type of *pritzus*, no matter how minimal the exposure might be.

This lesson, and the importance of distancing ourselves from any negative influence, is reinforced by an episode which occurred at the time of *Matan Torah*. We learn that when Bnei Yisroel were standing at Har Sinai, Hashem "turned over the mountain 'k'gigis' 'like a bucket,' and warned them: "If you will not accept the Torah, **there** will be your burial place!"

These two terms seem unusual: Chazal's specific phrase "like a bucket," and Hashem's word choice of "there" instead of the logical "here." Perhaps viewing the scene at Har Sinai through a different lens will clarify the meaning of these terms.

Usually, we interpret Hashem's words at Har Sinai as a threat: if Bnei Yisroel did not accept the Torah, then they would die, at that location (hence, the expected use of the term "here," referring to the site of their burial). Their fear compelled them to accept the Torah.

Now let us explore this event on another level. The deeper meaning of "turning over the mountain" is that Hashem said to Bnei Yisroel: "Even if you think that you can live without the Torah (and therefore decline to accept it), know that it will only seem that you are free. In reality, however, you will be trapped there inside "the bucket" of *Olam Haze'h*, experiencing a spiritual burial, as it were. You will not be free!"

The holy days of Shavuot were an ideal time to appreciate the gift of Torah, and to embrace its *mitzvos*. It is an appropriate time as well to commit ourselves to avoid any negative *hashpa'ah* of this world, accepting only the yoke of Torah, the true source of our freedom.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Kovod Sefarim

Rabbi Pesach Gottesman

The Torah obligates us to honor our parents, *talmidei chachamim*, and the elderly. Rav Mattisyahu Solomon explains that the reason behind this *mitzvah* is that honoring an individual enables one to accept teachings from him. Similarly, treating *sefarim* properly will surely enhance our ability to appreciate their contents. Chazal instituted many *halachos* to ensure that we honor and respect the *sefarim* we study.

One may not sit on a chair, bench or bed on which a *sefer* has been placed. The *Bais Yosef* (Y.D. 282) quotes those who rule leniently regarding the permissibility of sitting on a bench where *sefarim* are laying, if the *bais medrash* is very crowded; however, the *Bais Yosef* then says that one should not do so, in order to avoid belittling the honor of the *sefarim*. Some allow sitting on a bench with *sefarim* (*b'sha'as hadchak*) if the *sefarim* are in an upright position (see *Oz Nidbiru* vol 11, 4). Most *poskim* rule leniently, permitting one to sit if there is anything separating the *sefer* from the bench, even if only paper-thin. It is permitted to place a *sefer* on an empty bench but not on the floor or any place where it is common for people to walk or stand, such as on stairs or a stage. If the *sefarim* are raised one *tefach* (3 inches) off the ground or placed in a *keli* such as a plastic bag, they are not considered to be placed on the floor. *Sefarim* which have not been used may be placed on the floor with just a small separation. Playing cards featuring *pesukim* may be placed on the floor because cards are normally used in this manner (*Ginzei Hakodesh* 2, 15, in the name of Rav Elyashiv). A Jewish newspaper containing some *divrei Torah* may be placed on the floor as long as pages with Torah don't touch the floor (for example, the *Hamodia* magazines often quote Chazal on the inside cover and should not be put on the floor).

According to the *Mishnah Berurah* (40,13), one should not sit on a box containing *sefarim* or even on a chair or bench with a compartment underneath. *B'sha'as hadchak* one may sit on a bench with *sefarim* underneath if there is a *tefach* between the seat and the *sefarim*. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (282,4) however, allows sitting above *sefarim* contained in a box, under any circumstance. According to all opinions, if the box is attached to the floor or wall (such as a bookshelf)

one may sit on it (*Nekudas Hakesef* 282). The *sefer Chasidim* (*siman* 920) warns against placing a child on a table which is only used for *sefarim* (such as a *shtender* in *shul*).

If a *sefer* falls on the floor, one should hurry to pick it up even if he is in middle of learning. If one is in middle of *Shemoneh Esrei* and sees a *sefer* on the floor, he should not pick it up unless the sight is disturbing his concentration (*M.B.* 96, 7). The *minhag* is to kiss a *sefer* after it is picked up from the floor. If many *sefarim* fall on the floor, one may stack them on the floor if doing so will expedite gathering them. It is forbidden to throw *sefarim* (*S.A. Y.D.* 282, 5). It is permitted to send a *sefer* to someone by mail as long as it is wrapped up properly.

One should not place a *sefer* face down even if one does so with the intention of saving his place. Although one should not place objects on top of *sefarim*, one may place something heavy such as a tissue box or a hat on a *sefer* in order to hold it open. One should not keep a *sefer* open and leave the room (*Bach* 277 in the name of the *Yerushalmi*). The *Shach* (*ibid.*) adds that there is a *malach* by the name of *Shomer Dapim* (lit. guardian of the pages) who is appointed to cause one who leaves his *sefer* open and doesn't return, to forget his Torah. The *Aruch HaShulchan* writes that it is permissible to leave a *sefer* open if one is leaving for a short period of time, such as to use the bathroom or get a drink.

A *sefer* should only be used for its intended purpose (study). It should not be used for shade, pushing open a door, or balancing a cup of coffee. If a *sefer* is already lying on a table it may be used to prop up another one (*Taz* 282, 13). The *Mishnah Berurah* (154, 31) even permits one to bring another *sefer* in order to prop up the first one. It would seem that one may also use *sefarim* to facilitate learning, such as to describe a scenario in the Gemara. *Sifrei Tanach* may not be placed on top of a *Chumash*, and other *sefarim* may not be placed on *sifrei Tanach*. One should not store non-Torah papers in a *sefer*. If one wants to keep blank paper in his Gemara, he should either use a notebook containing some used pages or write a line of Torah on the blank paper (such as "*Chush Ben Dan*").

Rabbi Gottesman is a full-time member of the kollel.