

THE CLANTON PARK HERALD

A monthly newsletter, intended to provide timely and pertinent information to *shul* members

Vol 2, Issue 10, Tammuz 5765 website: www.clantonpark.com email: bulletin@clantonpark.com

From the Rabbi...

PARASHAS CHUKAS, THE LIMITS OF LOGIC

Zos chukas ha'Torah, "this is the law of the Torah," is the phrase with which our *parasha* is introduced. *Chok* the root of *chukas*, following the translation that we just offered, seems to be synonymous with *mishpat*, *din*, and *pikud*; it seems to be one of the many Hebrew terms for "law." It is appropriate, isn't it, that Hebrew, the language of a religion and of a people, whose *raison d'être* is law, should have so many words for this one concept. And yet. All of these different Hebrew words cannot carry the same, exact meaning, can they? Our Divine language is not the dialect of duplication. Each one of these words must have its own particular nuance; each one of these terms must carry its own meaning.

What, then, are the particularities of the word *chok*? What specific type of "law" is *chok* referring to? The *Midrash Tanchuma* explains *chok* to mean a law that transcends logic. And indeed the laws that follow our *parasha's* introduction, the laws of impurity and of purification do not lend themselves to easy rationalization. And so, we are warned: accept, perform and cherish these laws, but do not assume that you will plumb their Divine depths. Human logic cannot plumb the Divine, can it? Accept the mental limitations that are part and parcel of the human experience.

Why these insights on *chok* are offered at this juncture is, in my mind, obvious. These insights are a response to Korach, the protagonist of last week's *parasha*. Korach, who sparked a rebellion against Moshe and against all that Moshe represented, was motivated, at least according to the following interpretation of a *Midrash*, by an inability to accept such mental limitations. The *Midrash Tanchuma* tells us that Korach asked Moshe the following question: "A garment that is all of blue wool, does it need to have its *tzitzis*

dyed with blue wool? A house that is full of religious books, does it need *mezuzos* on its front doors?" Two different questions, but, interestingly enough, one common denominator: both of these *mitzvos* seem illogical. The blue wool in the *tzitzis* are meant to remind a person of Hashem who dwells in the blue heavens; a completely blue garment, already so suffused in heavenly reminders should therefore not need that blue strand. A *mezuzah* is meant to remind the homeowner of Hashem's Torah. Does a house that is already full of Torah really need a *mezuzah*?

Korach's logic was flawless. But even the most flawless logic will not take you very far in an arena that transcends human logic. And so, immediately after the Korach debacle, the Torah teaches us: *zos chukas ha'Torah*, "this is the law of the Torah."

The *Midrash* speaks to us contemporary Canadians, doesn't it? In rational, logical, contemporary Canada, people do only that which makes sense to them. *Mitzvos* that seem illogical are relegated to the back burner. But that is not a path that we can take. No, if we want to carry the Torah, we must remember: *zos chukas ha'Torah*. Much of the Torah is a *chok*, much is beyond our understanding. Do it if you understand it, and, likewise, do it if you don't understand it. The only way to touch the Divine is to leave, on occasion, the trappings of humanity behind, even if those trappings contain the logic that is the core of that motivation to seek that same Divine.

Mazel Tovs

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Michael and Marsha Lax, on the bar-mitzvah of their son, Aitan. Mazel tov, as well, to the grandparents, Mr. And Mrs. Harry Sporer.

Tommy and Judy Hofstedter, on the bar-mitzvah of their son, Aryeh Hostedter. Mazel tov, as well, to the grandfather, Sandy Hofstedter.

Moshe and Renee Shields, on the bas-mitzvah of their daughter, Meira. Mazal tov, as well, to the grandparents, Dr. Yehudi and Ruth Shields.

David and Penny Zimmerman, on the marriage of their daughter, Shiffie, to Simchy Zimmerman of Montreal. Mazel tov, as well, to the grandmother, Magda Zimmerman.

Joseph and Esty Edell, on the marriage of their son, Daniel, to Miri Bodner, of Monsey. Mazel tov as well to the grandparents, Aron and Miriam Frankel.

Mish and Betty Klein, on the marriage of their son, Yossi, to Devora Shabbos of Baltimore.

Dr. Kenny and Reena Greenwald, on the marriage of their daughter, Shayna, to Teddy Kahn of New York City.

Leslie and Annette Rosenthal, on the birth of a granddaughter, Yasmin Adira, to their children Tami and Chaim Rutman. Mazal tov, as well, to the grandparents, Chana and Ronnie Rutman, and to the great-grandparents, William and Miriam Rosenthal and Meyer and Sylvia Zeifman.

Rabbi Leo and Faygie Davids, on the birth of a grandson, Yishai Avraham, to their children, Rabbi Noach and Rivka Sonenberg. Mazel tov, as well, to the grandparents, Larry and Cheryl Sonenberg, and to the great-grandparents, Ann Shields, and Mr. And Mrs. Jay Waltman.

Sara Hochman, on the bar-mitzvah of her grandson.

Max and Ruth Neuberger, on the marriage of their granddaughter.

David and Lola Herzig, on the marriage of their granddaughter.

Condolences

To the entire Kanner family on the passing of Naftali Kanner -- to Mrs. Mozelle Kanner, on the loss of her husband, to Hersch Kanner, Manuel Kanner, Mrs. Madeline Greenberg, and Mrs. Rona Grodzinski, on the loss of their father.

Rebbetzin Gittel Gordon, on the loss of her sister, Ann Cugelman.

Mrs. Bauer, on the loss of her brother, Morris.

Shul News and Rules

Mazel Tov and Yasher koach ... to the newly installed Executive ... please feel free to call them if you would like to get more involved...

President	Gary Kopstick
1 st Vice-President	Moshe Shields
2 nd Vice-President	Ken Goldstein
Secretary	Morris Sosnovitch
Treasurer	Aaron Frankel
House Maintenance	Paul Jacobs
Bikkur Cholim	Irwin Diamond
Chevra Kadisha	Hersch Kanner
Communications	Norman Weisbart
Financial	Sandy Hofstedter
Gabboim	Gershon Kaplan
	Dr. Yehudi Shields
Hall Rental	Joshua Levi
Membership	Mendy Goldman
Israel Bonds	Sammy Nussbaum
Library	Sid Wellman
Social	Howard Lyons
Youth	Manuel Kanner
Bulletin	Ken Stollon

Youth News

A message and a poem ... from Rebecca Kurtz, the Girls' Youth Director...

Dear Girls: It has been a pleasure spending time with you this year. It was so exciting to see so many of you come out and participate month after month. I hope you all have a fun and safe summer!

It's so amazing how the year went by so fast.
I guess that's what happens when you're having a blast.

Let's take a look back at the year in review, and see what Clanton Park Girl's Youth had in store for you.

Our first event scored a hole in one,
The *Putting Edge* providing *Sukkos* golfing fun.

In November we gathered in the basement of the *shul*, we made *mezuzahs* – they were very cool.

Our *Chanukah* event was a sight to be seen, we went to *Just Bounce* so the girls could trampoline.

On *Tu B'Shevat*, the younger girls planted flowers to bring home,

while the older girls made pot pourri trees from Styrofoam.

On *Purim Katan, Hamentashen* we ate, and some beautiful masks we did decorate.

Our *Purim* program was like a dream, the martial arts instructors taught us to kick and scream.

On *Pesach Sheini*, we went to play volleyball, *Beach Blast* turned out to be fun for all.

Our final event included girls from grades 1- 8, We all went to *Rinx*, to rollerskate!

Editorial: My Interviews with the Founding Members

Many fellow congregants have commented to me over the past months how much they enjoyed reading my interviews with the founding members. I interviewed six couples. The other founding members that I approached preferred not to be interviewed, so, sadly for me, the "interview series" is now over. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know these very special people, and I found their stories inspiring and uplifting. Many of them are survivors, who found new roots in Canada, and ultimately in the Clanton Park neighbourhood.

What they created – the *shul* and the surrounding community is a gift – to us and to future generations. It is our responsibility to appreciate it and to continue to foster its growth.

This issue, in lieu of an interview, we have two guest contributions from the *shul*. Enjoy!

Reflections on the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Bergen Belsen

Howard and Nancy Kleinberg

Nancy and I recently returned from a visit to *Yad Vashem*. We were there to observe *Yom HaShoah* and to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen, which took place on April 15, 1945. This gathering was attended by 6,000 survivors and their children from all over the world.

The program was well-executed by the officials of *Yad Vashem*, from the moment of our arrival at Ben Gurion Airport. The afternoon of our arrival, we joined the others for a reception at the Renaissance Hotel, where we stayed. The following day, we toured Jerusalem. At night, *erev Yom HaShoah*, we gathered at *Yad Vashem* for the memorial service. The weather was cold and to add to the mood of the moment it began to rain as if the heavens were joining us in

crying for the victims of the *Shoah*. The rain stopped and the candle-lighting ceremony in memory of the Six Million started. All the Dignitaries from the Government of Israel were in attendance, including the President of the State and most of the members of the Cabinet.

To light the six candles, six individuals were selected. Each had a story to tell about the bravery of survival. We found one story particularly moving. The story was told by a man who had lived in the Vilna Ghetto. The Germans, in order to liquidate the Ghetto, took the 25,000 Jews outside of the city, where they were shot. This man, together with a handful of others, were selected to dispose of the bodies. The tragedy for him was that he found himself picking up the members of his own immediate family, including his parents, siblings and cousins. He had to take their bodies and throw them into a pit in order to dispose of them. For us, listening to him, we had the feeling that we were re-living the past.

Over the next few days, there were many activities at *Yad Vashem*. We visited the new museum, which is a must for everyone to see. We attended concerts by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as concerts by *chazanim*, all centered around the theme of the *Shoah*.

Sunday, the eighth of May, we attended a workshop entitled, "Life After The Liberation". When we entered the lecture hall, we found six people on the podium, five men and one woman. They were telling their stories of survival, of how they came to Israel, established themselves and raised families after the war. One of the participants introduced himself as a Rabbi Hardman of London, England. Rabbi Hardman, who is 92 years old, was a British chaplain during the war and was part of the lead unit that liberated Bergen Belsen. He went on to recount how, when he entered the camp, he was completely overwhelmed with the enormity of the tragedy. Following his remarks, the moderator asked for questions or comments from the audience. No one responded, so I raised my hand to speak.

I introduced myself as a survivor of Bergen-Belsen, together with my wife. I expressed my thanks to Hashem and to Rabbi Hardman for helping to liberate us at that time. I must have said a bit more because a few minutes later I was approached by a news crew from CNN who asked us if we would consent to an interview. We agreed and began to tell them the following true story:

April 15th was the day of liberation. The women were now able to come over to the men's camp, hoping to find family and relatives among the survivors. I had endured so much until this point

that I felt the end was near for me, so I lay down among a pile of corpses. Thankfully Hashem had other plans, and after lying there for a little while, an unbelievable miracle happened. Two women and a young girl showed up at the place where I was lying. They recognized me, since they had lived in the same city as I had. At this point, an argument took place between them whether or not to help me. The young girl said: "If you take him in, I will look after him." The others were convinced that I was a dead man. I do not know how this young girl was able to do it, but she brought me into their room and I was given a bed to rest on. The young girl looked after me as best as she could, but, after three weeks, I could feel my body getting weaker. I begged for a doctor but since the war was still on, there were no doctors available. One morning, I woke up and crawled out of the small room into the street where luckily I was picked up by a military truck and taken to a hospital. I remained there for six months, mainly in isolation, due to my terrible condition. The three women had no idea where I was. When I got out of the hospital, I was hoping to find the girl that saved my life, but she was nowhere to be found.

Miraculously, we met up in Toronto, in 1947, where I was finally able to thank her for her kindness. The moment I saw her, I fell in love with her and we were married in 1950. We became members of Clanton Park Synagogue soon after. I am so proud of the beautiful family we have, as well as the recent celebration of our 55th wedding anniversary. We are so grateful to Hashem for all the kindness He has shown us throughout these years.

The Torah is not in Heaven **Professor Paul Socken**

Everyone knows the *aggada* about Rabbi Eliezer and the Sages. In *Bava Metzia* 59, Rabbi Eliezer declares an oven kosher and the Sages say it is not. Rabbi Eliezer calls on the carob tree to corroborate his judgment and the carob tree uproots itself and moves. The Sages are unimpressed. He asks proof of the stream of water and it obligingly flows backwards. The Sages remain unimpressed. He asks the walls of the *beis midrash* to bear witness to the correctness of his *halachic* ruling and the walls begin to tilt. The Sages persist in their refusal. Finally, Rabbi Eliezer calls on Heaven to validate his decision and a voice arises from Heaven to say that he is correct; the Sages respond that the Torah is not in Heaven and that decisions will be made according to the majority.

This story underlines the idea that the Torah was given to us and that it is up to us to create the *halacha* without intervention of any kind from out-

side sources no matter what those sources may be. Sages of Torah learning will decide how to interpret Torah and that decision is final and eternal.

However, few people read on. There is a second part to that *aggada*. The story does not end here. The Sages decide to pronounce a ban upon Rabbi Eliezer when there is no mention of the fact that he had not ultimately accepted their decision. Rabbi Akiva accepts the mission of informing Rabbi Eliezer about the ban lest "a person who is unworthy of such a mission will go and thus destroy the whole world". When Rabbi Eliezer learns about the ban, he cries bitterly and calamity befalls the people: a third of the crops are lost and everything on which he turns his gaze burns up.

Rabban Gamliel, the power behind the ban, dies when Rabbi Eliezer's prayers ascend to heaven. Ima Shalom, Rabbi Eliezer's wife and the sister of Rabban Gamliel, says that she knew that her brother would die because "all heavenly gates are closed, except for the gates of prayer [of those are wronged through words]."

What does this second, neglected part of the *aggada* mean and what does it teach us? It should be clear that the first part of the story deals with the legal process and how *halachic* decisions will be made amongst Jews. The judgment of the majority of the Sages must be respected and followed. But why was the second part of the story added? It demonstrates that the legal process was followed but at the expense of a great scholar. The story tells us that the legal process and interpersonal relationships are one. Hashem's law cannot be decided justly without sensitivity and grace for all concerned. When Hashem learns that His own voice was overruled, He is said to have rejoiced: "My sons have overcome Me in debate!" Hashem glories in defeat, but His sons were not capable of being generous in victory. This wrong is unforgivable and would be punished. The legal process would not be allowed to exist to embarrass or humiliate someone but instead to elevate and sustain.

The fact that the second part of the story is not as well known as the first is unfortunate because it is inseparable from it. It suggests that Judaism is a legal framework that exists not at the expense of people but for their benefit. Majority rule must not become the tyranny of the majority. Hashem Himself intervenes to demonstrate in the most dramatic terms that the legal process is abused when it is not carried out with respect, sensitivity and compassion. The inescapable message is that Torah Judaism is the mind and the heart together, the *halacha* and the generosity of spirit that animates it.