

THE CLANTON PARK HERALD

A monthly newsletter, intended to provide timely and pertinent information to *shul* members
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From the Rabbi...

FAMILIARITY BREEDS SHMOOZING

The *tefilla*, *le'Dovid Hashem Ori*, Tehillim 27, is the denouement of our *davening* during the month of Elul. A climax within this beautiful *tefilla* is the uplifting request, *achas shu'alti mei'eis Hashem... shivti be'veis Hashem kul yimei Chayai*. "One thing I ask from *Hashem*... to dwell in the house of *Hashem*, all the days of my life." The *tefilla* then continues and adds the following finale to the request: *u'levaker be'heichulo*, "and to visit in his sanctuary".

Oxymoronic, isn't it? Our initial request, the request to dwell in *Hashem's* house is sweeping, even grand. But then, strangely enough, that entire sweep, all that grandiosity is reversed in a tempered reiteration of the same request: *u'levaker be'heichulo*, "and to visit in his sanctuary." Not to dwell, but instead, to only visit. Why are we now content with only visiting? Why not the dwelling that we had spoken of before?

The *Higyonei Halacha* quotes a Rambam who, by addressing the issue at hand, offers a perspective that speaks volumes. The Rambam writes, "every sanctified item, when a person is constantly involved in it, there will be a diminishment in what his soul can draw from it." The Rambam is spelling out something that we know intuitively; it is especially hard to achieve spiritual stimulation in familiar, commonplace situations.

The Rambam, as mentioned, can be used to address the emphasis on visiting rather than dwelling in *Hashem's* home. Dwelling in the house of *Hashem* is a great blessing; it is also a mixed blessing. The home in which we dwell is also the home of familiarity. Familiarity, even when it does not breed contempt, breeds dullness, banality and, on occasion, even outright disrespect. It is hard to feel the magic of sanctity, to touch grandiosity in the venue of dull day-to-day

life. And so, in *le'Dovid Hashem Ori*, we ask *Hashem*, yes, even if we do establish permanent residence in your home, even if we do come to *shul* morning, afternoon and night, day in, day out, please do not allow that familiarity to chip away at the excitement and at the uplifted feeling that we felt the very first time that we walked through the door.

This is not only, or even primarily, about the *beis ha'mikdash*, is it? It is about our *shuls*; it is about our *davening*. No one is oblivious to the sanctity that pervades our *shul*, or any other *shul*, for that matter. No one wants a lack of decorum to prevail. No one means harm. And yet so many people talk in *shul* when they shouldn't be talking, are cavalier about *shul* matters, and even (perhaps inadvertently) show disrespect toward *shul* matters that are deserving of respect. And we know why this is so. It is because we, who spend mornings, after-noons and evenings in *shul*, we who learn, *daven* and socialize in *shul* are perhaps too familiar, too comfortable with our *shuls*. We have forgotten that *shul* is a magical, grandiose place. And so the decorum slips, the talking begins, the *davening* is eroded. But Elul, when we read *le'Dovid Hashem Ori*, when we ask *Hashem* not just to allow us to dwell in his home, but also to ensure that we remember that we are only visiting his home, is the time in which that magic can be recreated. And it will be.

Over the coming year, let us ensure that decorum is a focal point of our *shul's* development. Let us ensure that our *davening* takes place in a quiet, dignified manner. There have been many changes in our *shul*; let us make this the next. Bit by bit, step by step we will regain the sanctity that we are all thirsting for. Our *shul*, and we, will only be better off because of this.

Mazel Tovs

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Rabbi and Rebbetzin Yehoshua Weber on the birth of their son, Dov.

Gershon and Faige Kaplan, on the marriage of their son, Yitzchak, to Chani Cymbalista of Thornhill. Mazel tov, as well, to the grandparents, Sidney and Pearl Woolf,

Mendy and Fay Goldman, on the marriage of their son, Danny, to Tamara Zicherman

Daniel and Rona Grodzinski, on the marriage of their daughter, Gabriella, to Eitan Green from Ra’anana, who is the grandson of Phil and Faygie Schwartz. Mazel tov, as well, to the grandmother, Mrs. Mozelle Kanner.

Carol Brown, on the engagement of her daughter, Batya Brown, to Rudy Bromberg of Toronto.

Issy and Ellen Isakow, on the engagement of their daughter, Dori, to Sruly Weiss of Toronto.

Dr. Allan and Susan Seidenfeld, on the engagement of their daughter, Ahuva, to Josh Kleiner of New York.

Dr. Allan and Susan Seidenfeld, on the birth of a grandson, Shlomo, to their children, Ari and Dassi. Mazel tov as well to the Hofstedter family.

Mr and Mrs Aaron Lang, on the birth of twin grandchildren, Hadassa and Moshe, to their children Shana and Ronnie Strauss.

Percy and Frances Kopstick on the birth of a great-grandson, Shlomo Chaim.

Condolences

To Mrs. Witty, and the entire Witty family, on the passing of Rabbi Irwin Witty, husband, father, grandfather, and revered community leader.

To Mrs. Shirley Silverberg, and the Silverberg and Cohen families, on the passing of Joseph Silverberg, husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Mr. Silverberg was one of the founding members of Clanton Park Shul.

To Mr. Morris Starkman, on the loss of his sister.

Shul News

Schedule of Ticket Committee Sittings for Yamim Noraim....

Tuesday, September 27th, 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM
Wednesday, September 28th 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM
Thursday, September 29th, 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM
Sunday, October 2nd, 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Selichos Schedule...

First selichos - Motza’ei Shabbos,
Sept. 26th 1:00 AM

Mondays and Thursdays – 6:20 AM and 6:55 AM
Tues., Wed. and Fridays – 6:30 AM and 7:05 AM
Sunday, October 2nd – 7:00 AM and 7:55 AM
Erev R”H, Monday, October 3rd – 6:00 AM

Mechitza... Due to the increasing number of women in our congregation who find it difficult to climb the stairs to the *Ezras Nashim*, there is an urgent need to build a permanent *mechitza*, in order to create an *Ezras Nashim* in the rear of the downstairs main sanctuary. The executive would like to do this in the most efficient and aesthetically pleasing manner, and with sensitivity to the men who are currently sitting at the rear of the *shul*, and who may need to be relocated elsewhere in the *shul*. We are therefore soliciting ideas and suggestions. Please email any suggestions to bulletin@clantonpark.com, or you may speak directly with the House Chairman, Paul Jacobs.

Renovations at the front entrance of the shul

... Extensive renovations and landscaping have been done to beautify the outside front entrance of the *shul*. Yasher koach to Hershel Sporer and Sydney Woolf, who generously provided the funds for this project.

Youth News

Youth!! Youth!! Youth!! We’re off to a great start! The youth *minyan* is bursting with aspiring *Ba’alei Kriah* and *Tefilah*. We hope everyone will step forward and prepare. *Yasher Koach* to the *gabboim* and participants. Thanks to all the visitors for keeping the *Bais Medrash* silent during services.

Stay tuned for junior youth *minyanim*, *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, *Rosh Chodesh*, *Seudas Shelishis*, *Chazanus/Nusach Hatfilah*, and many more great programs!!!

Your input and suggestions are always welcome. Clanton Park is geared up for the best youth programs the city has to offer.

Contact us.... Manuel Kanner and Rebecca Kurtz

LESSONS FROM THE CAVE

Professor Paul Socken

Dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Irwin Witty, who would have appreciated the ideas herein expressed.

The *aggada* in *Shabbat 33b/34a* tells the well-known story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai and his son, Eliezer, who flee the Romans and hide, first in a *beis hamidrash*, and then in a cave for twelve years. R' Shimon had condemned Roman high culture's bathhouses, markets and modernity and word of his condemnation had reached the Romans. His wife brings them water and bread while they are hiding in the *beis hamidrash*. This partial withdrawal from society reduces him and his son to the basics – bread and water – and the primal family: wife, husband and son. However, he fears that his wife may be tortured into revealing their whereabouts, so he and his son retreat to a cave where they remove their clothes, bury themselves up to the neck in sand and study Torah all day, every day for twelve years. They survive due to the miraculous appearance of a carob tree and a well of water. Their withdrawal from civilized society is complete: they are naked cave dwellers living the polar opposite of Roman civilization and devoted to Torah alone.

After twelve years, Elijah comes and declares that the Emperor is dead and the decree annulled. Elijah does not speak to them directly, as they had become so ethereal and removed from this world that he merely announces the fact aloud. R' Shimon and Eliezer leave the cave, see people ploughing and sowing, and condemn them for occupying themselves with temporal matters. Their mere glances of scorn burn everything in sight. No less than a Heavenly Voice criticizes them for destroying the world and sends them back to the cave for another year.

At the end of the year, a Heavenly Voice orders them to leave the cave and they see a Jewish man before Shabbos hurrying along with two bunches of myrtles. The man explains that one bunch is for *Zachor* (Remembering Shabbos) and the other for *Shamor* (Safeguarding Shabbos). R' Shimon suddenly realizes that those who participate in the world do have a spiritual side and he is partially reconciled to the temporal world.

Rabbi Shimon's son-in-law greets him and takes him to the bathhouse (as thirteen years of sitting in the sand had caused great damage to his skin). The son-in-law cries bitter tears which fall on R' Shimon and burn his sore skin, demonstrating first that he paid a huge price for his withdrawal from the world and that he was now re-entering that world that he had so bitterly condemned. In fact, the healing waters of the bathhouse restore him to health and he comes to see that the Roman culture that he scorned does have potential for good and healing.

At this point, the *aggada* relates that R' Shimon had been able to give thirteen answers for every question before his retreat to the cave and now is able to give twenty-four answers, thanks to his complete devotion to Torah. This is important because complete devotion to Torah does have obvious benefits and working in the world does permit less complete knowledge of Torah.

However, both paths, withdrawal from the world and contact with the world, have their costs and their benefits.

It is also at this point that *Genesis 33:18* is quoted, which recounts Jacob's arrival in Shechem, after his encounter with Esau. The Torah uses the word *shalem* -- "whole" -- in relation to Jacob, which Rav interprets to mean whole physically, whole financially and whole in his Torah learning. This stresses that Jacob was not removed from the world: he needed to be strong physically and he needed finances, in addition to knowledge of Torah to accomplish his mission.

R' Shimon finally comes to the understanding that it is not enough to simply return to the world of physicality. Like the patriarch Jacob, he must work to repair the world and "make some improvement". This signals his integration into the world. He discovers that there is a place that may be unclean, forcing the *kohanim* to make a detour around it. R' Shimon causes a miracle to occur which purifies the area. The *aggada* ends with criticism of R' Shimon and his gaze turns the critic into a heap of bones. R' Shimon, it seems, still retained divine powers but was willing to court criticism to work to improve the world and not remove himself from temporal reality.

This *aggada* is tremendously important for our contemporary world. R' Shimon originally sees absolutely no good in contemporary culture and condemns everything not directly connected to Torah. However, he is sent back to the cave by the Heavenly Voice to learn what he had not learned in the previous twelve years: that the world is jeopardized by those who polarize Torah and the world. Complete withdrawal from the world may allow for total devotion to Torah but its cost is too great. The Jew running before Shabbos with the two bunches of myrtles – myrtles are an agricultural product used for sacred purposes, a symbol of the unity of Torah and the world – teaches R' Shimon that withdrawal from the world is not the only path to Hashem.

The model for the Jew in the world is Jacob, who was a bridge between Torah and worldly pursuits, and was able to integrate the two. R' Shimon had to endure thirteen years in the cave and re-enter the world to discover its complexity and meaning in order to teach us that temporal life and worldly pursuits are part of Torah life. Apparently, some lessons, the really important ones, take a long time to learn. R' Shimon's decision to "fix something", to participate in improving the world, even in the face of inevitable criticism, is the final act in his integration into the world, his understanding of Hashem's desire that man elevate the temporal and not retreat from it. Torah AND the world, not Torah OR the world.