

ב"ה



לעילוי נשמת מקסים בן סופיה

IN MEMORY OF MAXIM BEN SOFIA (FATHER NOT
JEWISH)
MAXIM



משנה
For נשמה

MISHNA *For* NESHAMA

ברכות ג:א

מי שמתו מטל לפניו פטור מקריאת שמע, ומן התפלה, ומן התפלין. נושאי המטה וחלופיהן וחלופי חלופיהן, את שלפני המטה, ואת שלאחר המטה: את שלמטה צרך בהן פטורין, ואת שאין למטה צרך בהן חיבין. אלו ואלו פטורין מן התפלה

Berachot 3:1

One whose deceased relative is not yet buried is exempt from reading the Shema and the Amida prayer, and from the mitzvah to wear tefillin, until the deceased has been buried. Concerning the pallbearers and their replacements and the replacements of their replacements, those located before the coffin who have not yet carried the deceased and those located after the coffin: Those who are needed to carry the coffin are exempt from reciting Shema; while those who are not needed to carry the coffin, are obligated to recite Shema. However, both are exempt from reciting the Amida prayer.

Insights

Caring for the dead is referred to as Chesed Shel Emmes – genuine kindness. When our forefather Yaacov was on his death bed, he instructed his son Yoseph to ensure that he would be transported from Egypt and buried in Israel. Yaacov said to Yoseph, “If you fulfill my request, you will have performed an act of kindness and truth.”

It is called genuine kindness because when you do a favor for a living person, in the back of your mind, there is always the thought that perhaps the recipient of my favor will repay me later. However, when doing something for the deceased there is no expectation of ever receiving anything in return.

Why do we observe “kavod ha-met”, respect for the dead?

When a person passes away, the neshama (the soul) still feels a connection to its body and stays near it until the burial. During this time period, the soul is aware of how its body is being treated and derives comfort knowing that its body is being given the ultimate respect.

Another reason is the very core of existence and why G-d created the universe.

G-d wanted a home in the physical world. According to the Chassidic masters, this is why the soul descended from heaven and partnered with its physical body. Only the combined effort of body and soul can reveal G-d's presence in this material world. Therefore, when the soul returns home to its Maker, we must offer the greatest level of respect to the soul's worldly partner.

It is worth mentioning that even after the burial, a part of the soul resides permanently at the gravesite. This explains why we visit our loved ones at the cemetery. We are not just visiting a slab of marble and lifeless remains, but rather, part of the eternal spirit of our beloved departed relative.

מ

Mem

is the thirteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'forty'. The word mem stands for mayim, which means water. A human being cannot survive without water.

Torah, the most vital element in our spiritual lives, is referred to as water, as it states: “Water refers to Torah.” Just as a human being cannot survive without water, a Jew cannot survive without Torah. By studying the mishnayot in this booklet, you will receive spiritual sustenance.

נדרים ח,א

ק

Kuf

is the nineteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'one hundred'. The Talmud tells of a time when one hundred of King David's soldiers would perish daily from an epidemic. David beseeched G-d for help. G-d's reply was to institute the recital of one hundred blessings a day, which David enacted to counteract the one hundred deaths. When we make a blessing, we are expressing gratitude to G-d. The more gratitude we display to G-d and our fellow man, the happier and more rewarding our lives will be. A simple thank-you can be life-changing and life-extending.

קוֹנָם יין שאני טועם היום - אינו אסור אלא עד שתחשך; שבת זו - אסור בכל השבת, ושבת שעברה; חדר זה - אסור בכל החדש, וראש חדר להבא; שנה זו - אסור בכל השנה, וראש השנה לעתיד לבוא; שבוע זה - אסור בכל השבוע, ושבועית שעברה. ואם אמר: יום אחד, שבת אחת, חדר אחד, שנה אחת, שבוע אחד - אסור מיום ליום.

Nedorim 8:1

If one vows: "Wine is forbidden to me as if it were an offering and for that reason I will not taste it today", he is prohibited from drinking wine only until nightfall. "This week", he is prohibited from drinking wine for the remainder of the week. And the upcoming Shabbat is considered part of the week that passed. "This month", wine is forbidden to him for the remainder of the month; and as the New Moon is considered part of the next month, he is permitted to drink wine on that day. "This year", he is prohibited from drinking wine for the remainder of the year; and as Rosh Hashanah is considered to be part of the upcoming year, he is permitted to drink wine on that day. "This seven-year Sabbatical cycle", wine is forbidden to him for the entire remainder of the seven-year cycle; and as the Sabbatical Year is considered part of the cycle that passed, he is prohibited from drinking wine during the upcoming Sabbatical Year. But if he said, "one day", or "one week", or "one month", or "one year", or "one seven-year" cycle, he is prohibited from drinking wine from the day and time he took the vow to the same time the next day, or week, etc.

Insights

As children, we either said or were told, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." There is little to no truth to it. King Solomon in Proverbs strongly disagrees with it, as he writes, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

One of the 613 commandments is the prohibition of Onaat Devorim, loosely translated as 'Words that Hurt'. We are prohibited from speaking in a manner that will be hurtful and painful to another human being. The Talmud writes that speaking in a hurtful way is more severe than stealing from the same person. Why? Money can be returned, whereas hurt feelings cannot be undone. A medieval scholar writes, "The root of this commandment is well-known - it is to give peace among the creatures. And great is peace, as through it blessing is found in the world; and difficult is disagreement - how many curses and tragedies are caused by it."

Being a man of his word was always considered a badge of honor

amongst the Jewish people. According to Jewish law, the sale or purchase of an item is deemed finalized once the item has been transferred from the seller to the purchaser.

However, the Sages frowned upon someone who wanted to renege on a deal once a verbal commitment had been established. And the individual would be told the following. "The One Who punished the people of the Generation of the Flood and Who punished the people of the Generation of the Dispersal following the construction of the Tower of Babel will punish the one who does not keep his word."

A great Rabbi remarked that we need to be as careful with what comes out of our mouth as what enters it.

תענית ב.א

סדר תעניות כיצד? מוציאים את התבה לרחובה של עיר; ונותנים אפר מקלה על גבי התבה ובראש הנשיא ובראש אב בית דין; וכל אחד ואחד נותן בראשו. הזקן שבהן אומר לפניו דברי כבושין. אחינו, לא נאמר באנשי נינוה. "וירא האלהים את שקם ואת תעניתם", אלא (יונה ג, י) "וירא האלהים את מעשיהם, כי-שבו מדרךם הרעה"; ובקבלה "הוא אומר (יואל ב, יג) "וקרעו לבבכם ואל-בגדיכם."

Tannit 2:1

What is the customary order of fast days? They remove the ark to the main city square and place ashes upon the ark as a sign of mourning. And they also place ashes on the head of the Nasi, the head of the chief of the court, and each person places ashes upon his own head. The elder of the community says to the congregation words of reproof, for example: "Our brothers, it is not stated about the people of Nineveh, 'And G-d saw their sackcloth and their fasting.' Rather, the verse says, 'And G-d saw their deeds, that they had turned away from their evil way.' And in the Prophets, it says: "And rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the L-rd your G-d."

Insights

During the calendar year, we fast on six separate occasions. Four of those fasts are to memorialize the destruction of the two Temples. However, our Mishnah deals with laws of fasts implemented due to a particular crisis facing the Jewish people, for instance, when the Land of Israel had experienced an extended period of drought. The Rabbis would institute additional prayers and fasting to beseech G-d to bring rain to fill the wells and irrigate the parched land.

Our Mishnah clearly establishes that prayer and fasting are insufficient; we must also do teshuvah.

What is teshuvah?

The word 'teshuvah' is often mistranslated as 'repentance'. Teshuvah is better translated as 'return'. When we do teshuvah, we are returning to G-d.

Teshuvah is an opportunity for self-evaluation and self-improvement.

Rambam writes that there are three steps when doing teshuvah.

Regret: We must feel genuine remorse for what we have done in the past.

Commitment: We need to make a firm decision never to repeat our sin.

Confession: We need to verbalize our misdeeds.

According to Jewish tradition, teshuvah can only atone for sins against G-d. Sins against our fellow man can only be atoned once we have rectified our wrongdoing. For example, if we have stolen something, we must first return the stolen object and ask forgiveness from the aggrieved party.

We live in a world where we can only move in one direction - forward. We cannot go back in time, as the saying, 'time waits for no man'. There is one exception to that rule - teshuvah. The ability to do teshuvah is a gift from G-d. G-d is telling us, I am giving you the ability to go back in time and rectify the past sins. And by doing teshuvah, I will wipe your slate clean.

ס

Samech

is the fifteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'sixty'. The design of the samech is a closed circle. The Talmud writes that a person's life is like a circle; there are times when we are on top of the world and times when we seem to be at the bottom of the curve. When we are at the top we should not take it for granted; we must appreciate and be thankful for our successes and not forget those at the bottom of the curve. And if we are at the bottom, we must remember that G-d can bring us up to the top of the circle in the blink of an eye.



יומא ח,א

יום הכפונים אסור באכילה ובשתיה וברחיצה
 ובסיכה ובנגילת הסנדל ובתשמיש המטה. והמלך
 והכלה ירחצו את פניהם, והחיה תנעל את הסנדל;
 דברי רבי אליעזר, וחכמים - אוסרין.

Yoma 8:1

On Yom Kippur it is prohibited to eat and drink, bathe, smear oil on one's body, wear shoes, and have marital intercourse. However, the king, in deference to his eminence, and a new bride within thirty days of her marriage, who wishes to look especially attractive for her husband, may wash their faces. A woman after childbirth, who is suffering, may wear shoes. This is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer. The Sages prohibit these activities for a king, a new bride, and a woman after childbirth.



Yud

is the tenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'ten'. The meaning of yud is a Yid, a Jew. One of the great mysteries of civilization is the secret of our survival. The ancient nations have been reduced to chapters in a history book while we continue to flourish and grow. Why?

We see life as a never-ending relay race that started at Mount Sinai. And each generation is tasked with receiving and transmitting the Torah and tradition. As we reflect on the life of our departed, let us recommit to continue passing the baton to the next generation faithfully.

Insights

Our Mishnah lists the Torah laws for the year's holiest day, Yom Kippur. Even the least observant Jews will make their way to the synagogue on Yom Kippur. Perhaps, by understanding the deeper meaning of the Day of Atonement, we will better understand the significance of observing a yahrtzeit.

One of the unique practices of Yom Kippur is that during the synagogue service we wear a kittel, an all-white garment.

There are two explanations for this custom. The first is that the kittel is a shroud as the deceased wear when buried. The kittel is meant to remind us of the day of our death. What a sobering thought - on Yom Kippur to contemplate death. Another reason given is that the kittel is a garment of purity. It expresses confidence and happiness.

What are we meant to do on Yom Kippur - thinking of death, or celebrating life?

A verse at the beginning of Bereishit describing creation states, "Behold it is very good." The Sages ask: What is very good? Their response is challenging to comprehend. They answer: Death. There is nothing better than death itself.

Why?

Without death, no one would truly live. We would be alive, but we would not live. Only when we recognize that our life is limited can we choose to live it fully. Another important result of death is realizing what is significant in life, what truly matters. The kittel doesn't have any pockets, nor do shrouds.

You can't take anything with you. Not money, not the experiences. Not even all your self-discovery. You can only take what you give. Yom Kippur reminds us of our mortality not to depress us, but so that we can make decisions that matter.

As we mark the yahrtzeit, it would be wise to remember the inner meaning of the kittel and the eternal message it shares.

ברכות ג:א

מ

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שבת כא,א

בְּיָטֵל אָדָם אֶת בְּנוֹ וְהֶאָבֵן בְּיָדוֹ, וְכִלְכְּלָה וְהֶאָבֵן
 בְּתוֹכָהּ. וּמִטְלָטְלִין תְּרוּמָה טְמֵאָה עִם הַטְּהוֹרָה וְעִם
 הַחֲלִין. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: אֶף מֵעֲלִין אֶת הַמְדָּמָע
 בְּאַחַד וּמֵאָה.

Shabbat 21:1

On Shabbos, one may take his son into the house, even though there is a stone, which is muktzeh (cannot be moved), in the child's hand. And it is permissible to take a basket with a stone inside on Shabbat. And one may move ritually impure teruma (food designated for the Cohen), which may not be eaten and is muktzeh (cannot be moved), with ritually pure teruma, as well as with non-sacred produce. Rabbi Yehuda says: One may even lift a measure of teruma that was nullified from a mixture of one hundred measures of non-sacred produce and one measure of teruma.

Insights

There are thirty-nine categories of work prohibited on Shabbat by Torah Law. Many have the misconception that Jewish law prohibits labor on the Shabbat and, therefore, they don't understand why we cannot turn on a light that takes no effort. Or driving a car to the synagogue, which takes less effort than walking.

The mistake lies in the inaccurate translation of one word in the Torah. When the Torah discusses the prohibition of not working on Shabbat, it does not use the word 'avodah' which is translated as work or labor. Instead, it uses the word 'melacha' which means a creative activity that demonstrates man's mastery over nature. By refraining from such actions, we acknowledge that G-d is the ultimate Creator and Master.

The Sages also enacted edicts whose purpose are to preserve the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest and holiness. One such law is called muktzeh - certain objects must be set aside and not moved on Shabbat.

Some reasons for this law are: Since it is forbidden to work on Shabbat, one might utilize the free time to rearrange the items in their home and carry them from one place to another, in contrast to the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest.

The Sages restricted the handling of items whose primary function is for an activity forbidden on Shabbat. Writing on the Shabbat is one of the thirty-nine Torah prohibitions. If we were permitted to hold a pen, inadvertently we may come to write with it. To safeguard this law, the Sages decreed that handling a pen is prohibited.



Nun

is the fourteenth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'fifty'. Nun means 'fish' in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud. When we stand by the sea and look down, all we see is water. Yet, we know beneath the surface there are thousands of different species of fish, coral, and vegetation. The fact that we can't see it does not negate its existence. Similarly, there is a spiritual world where the soul of the departed resides. Our inability to see it does not mean that it doesn't exist.

ש

Shin

is the twenty-first letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'three hundred'. On the tefillin worn on the head are two shins - one with three vertical lines protruding from the base and one with four. They symbolize our three forefathers and our four mothers. When one loses a parent, mourning is for twelve months. For all other blood relatives, mourning is for thirty days. When we lose a parent, we have lost the golden link in the chain that takes us all the way back to Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaacov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel, and Leah. Hence, the mourning is more intense.

שקלים וא

נְשִׁינָה שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר שׁוּפְרוֹת, שֶׁל נָּה עָשָׂר
שְׁלֹחָנוֹת, שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה הַשְׁתַּחֲוִיֹּת הָיוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ.
שֶׁל בֵּית רֶבֶן גַּמְלִיאֵל וְשֶׁל בֵּית רַבִּי חַנִּינָא סָגֵן
הַכֹּהֲנִים, הָיוּ מְשַׁתַּחֲוִין אַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרֵה. וְהִיכָן הִתְהַ
יְתָרָה? כְּנֶגֶד דִּיר הָעֵצִים, שָׁכָן מַסְרֵת בִּידָם
מֵאַבוֹתֵיהֶם שְׁשָׁם הָאָרוֹן נִגְזָר.

Shekalim 6,1

In the Temple there were thirteen chests, thirteen tables and thirteen prostrations. Members of the household of Rabban Gamaliel and of Rabbi Chanina, the chief of the priests, would prostrate fourteen times. And where was the additional prostration? In front of the wood storage yard, for they had a tradition from their ancestors that the Ark was hidden there.

Insights

King Solomon built the First Temple in 827 BCE, and it lasted for 410 years until the Greek Assyrian Empire destroyed it. The Jewish people were sent to exile in Babylonia for 70 years. It was during this period that the miracle of Purim happened. The Jewish people then returned to the Land of Israel, and under the guidance of the Prophets Ezra and Nechemya the Second Temple was built. It was completed in the year 349 BCE and lasted for 420 years. During this period the miracle of Chanukah occurred. It was destroyed by the Roman Empire in the year 69 CE. The third and final Temple will be built by Moshiach speedily in our days.

Three times a year - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot - all males would make a pilgrimage to the Temple. There were ten constant miracles in the Temple. One of them was that even though the altar was outside and exposed to the heavens, the rain never extinguished its fire. Similarly, even though the altar was open to the elements, the winds never disturbed the smoke from rising straight upward

like a pillar.

The Temples were the center of Jewish life. Our prayers focus on beseeching G-d that He should bring the Jewish people home and rebuild the Temple.

There is a fascinating discussion concerning the actual construction of the Third Temple: Either Moshiach and the Jewish people will build it, or as others say, it will descend from heaven. The Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that the two opinions are not necessarily contradictory. One of the suggestions he offers is that the Temple will initially be built by Moshiach together with the Jewish people. And then, a spiritual covering will descend from heaven and enclose the Temple, thereby ensuring that the structure will be eternal.



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ברכות ט,א

הַרוּאָה מְקוֹם שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ בּוֹ נִסִּים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אוֹמֵר
"בְּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה". מְקוֹם
שֶׁנַּעֲקָרָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה, אוֹמֵר "בְּרוּךְ שֶׁעָקַר
"עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה מֵאַרְצֵנוּ."

Berachot 9,1

One who sees a place where miracles occurred on Israel's behalf recites: "Blessed... Who performed miracles for our forefathers in this place." When in a place where idolatry was eradicated, one recites: "Blessed... Who eradicated idolatry from our land."

ה

Hay

is the fifth letter of the aleph-bet and has a numerical value of 'five'. The soul has five levels: nefesh, ruach, neshama, and yechidah Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe and the founder of Colel Chabad, writes that the soul is 'truly a part of G-d above'. Therefore, there is no such thing as a distant Jew as our souls are always bound and one with G-d.

Insights

What is the secret of Jewish survival? Throughout our history we have lived through pogroms, the crusades, the inquisition, and the holocaust, and somehow, we have survived. And not only have we survived, but we have also flourished.

There is only one explanation we can offer, and that is Divine intervention. Our existence is truly miraculous.

In truth, our very beginning was miraculous. The first Jew to be born was Yitzchak, the son of Abraham and Sarah. Both were of an age where they could no longer bear children. G-d performed a miracle and they were blessed with the first Jewish child. From that moment on, our survival has been nothing short of miraculous.

A great Rabbi who lived in the middle-ages wrote: Every time I wake up in the morning and see myself in the mirror, I am witnessing a miracle far greater than the splitting of the sea. I see a Jew who has lived through the destruction of Two Temples. I

see a Jew who has been dispersed to the four corners of the globe and has been exiled for over 1500 years. I see a Jew who has lived through the crusades, the inquisition, and the pogroms.

We can add that when we look in the mirror, we see a Jew who lived through the holocaust and lost 6 million family members. And yet, we are still here. Is this then not the greatest miracle of all? People often say that if we saw miracles like the Jews who left Egypt, we would believe.

If you saw freedom for 8 million Jews from the Former Soviet Union, then know you saw the freedom of 3 million Jews from Egypt.

If you saw our soldiers at the Western Wall on June 7, 1967, then know you have seen a shepherd boy slaying the mighty giant Goliath.

And if you saw the whispering embers rebuild the Jewish world, then know you saw the dry bones of Ezekiel come back to life.