



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

Published by OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL • Jerusalem, Israel

16 Elul 5759 • August 28, 1999 • Parshat Ki Tavo • No. 52

Light Insight

I'm Sorry To Wake You Up, But...

"Then you shall call out with a loud voice..." (Deuteronomy 26:5)

It's three o'clock in the morning. Your wife has just gone into labor. The doctor is looking concerned. You grab the phone and call a great Torah scholar and ask him to pray for your wife. He tells you not to worry. He gets up and prays for a healthy delivery.

After a difficult labor your wife presents you with a beautiful baby boy. Mother and baby

are fine. It's now Tuesday morning.

On Friday night you see the Torah scholar in shul and invite him to the *Shalom Zocher*, the traditional Friday night welcoming of the baby boy. He says to you "When you're wife went into labor, you called me at three in the morning to tell me. But when she gave birth you wait till the *Shalom Zocher*..."

A farmer understands that without rain and sun his crops will fail. Thus, he prays to G-d for the success of his produce; he prays fervently and with great motivation.

When all is harvested, he

brings the first of the harvest to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, fulfilling the mitzvah of offering the first fruits to G-d in thanks. To do so, he makes a formal declaration — several sentences about Jewish history, outlining G-d's unfailing kindness to His people. The Talmud explains that this declaration must be made in 'a loud voice.'

With that same fervor and intensity that we seek help and assistance, we must offer thanks and recognition. If we put in a heart-felt three-in-the-morning call for urgent help, let us thank G-d with that same urgency and depth of feeling when we reap the benefits of His kindness.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

The Land of Return

When the Babylonian king Nebucadnezar sent his general, Nebuzradan, to take the Jews forcibly out of the Land of

Israel, he instructed him to prevent them from praying so that they would not be able to

repent and return to G-d's favor, preventing their capture. Only when they reached the Babylonian border did the general tell his soldiers that they could stop driving their Jewish captives so hard that they wouldn't be able to pray,

because it was less likely that their repentance would be so readily accepted outside their land.

This commentary on the Book of Lamentations is cited as an explanation of the statement by Rabbi Elazar that one who resides in the Land of Israel lives without sin. There certainly have been sinners in the Land of Israel, but their repentance there is more readily accepted than anywhere else.

ETHICS of our FATHERS

“One who is ashamed to ask cannot learn and one who is quick to anger cannot teach.”

A person who hesitates to ask others to explain something vague or puzzling which he has read or heard because he is

afraid he will look foolish, will stay foolish.

A person who is easily angered is not suited to be a teacher or a spiritual leader of a community. Anger deprives him at that moment of the wisdom required to explain things properly, and so confuses both him and those trying to learn from him.

Furthermore, how can a student be expected to pay attention to someone who is hostile to him? The words of the wise are heard when they are gentle.

Response Line

Naranda Davina wrote:
Is Mark Twain Jewish?

Dear Naranda,

Mark Twain, whose real name was Samuel Clemens, was not Jewish. However he had the following to say about the Jews:

“The Jews constitute but 1% of the human race ... It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of... His contributions to the world’s list of great names are away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvellous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose... the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast

noise, and they are gone... The Jew saw them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no dulling of his alert mind. All things are mortal but the Jew... What is the secret of his immortality?”

Jill Schlessinger wrote:

Is there anything in the Torah (or in other Jewish writings) that addresses the issue of interpreting someone else’s feelings? For example: Something bad happens to someone and they are upset about it, and someone else tells them they are “over-reacting” and “irrational.” What do Jewish writings say about making judgments about the legitimacy of other people’s feelings?

Dear Jill,

In “Ethics of our Fathers” Hillel states, “Don’t judge another until you reach his place,” meaning, until you have been in the exact same

position. Therefore, you can almost never judge another’s feelings.

Even if one feels sure that the other person is over-reacting, he should carefully consider if, how and when to express it. As Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, “Don’t try to appease your friend at the moment of his anger, and don’t try to comfort him when his dead lies before him.” Trying to cheer someone up at the wrong time, can cause even more pain.

There are, to be sure, “inappropriate” emotions. For example, the Talmud forbids “crying too much” — i.e., for too long a time — at the loss of a loved one. Eventually a person must get over his losses and move forward.

Practically speaking, though, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter is reputed to have said: “When a child’s toy breaks, he feels as bad as an adult would feel if his factory were destroyed.” In short, people experience losses at different levels, so it’s nearly impossible to judge others’ feelings.