

The Path To Follow

Behar - Bechukotai 492

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Faith is the Foundation of Torah and Mitzvot

It is written, "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai" (Vayikra 25:1). The Sages ask, "What does the subject of the Shmita [seventh year] have to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all the commandments given from Sinai? However just as with the Shmita, its general principles and its smallest details all being given from Sinai, likewise all of them were given – their general principles and their smallest details – from Sinai" (Torat Kohanim, Behar 1). This is difficult to understand. Why does the Torah reveal this for the Shmita, rather than for some other mitzvah? To answer this question, let us first cite a statement made by the Ramban (Vayikra 25:2): "The six days of creation represent the days of the world, whereas the seventh day is a Sabbath to Hashem your G-d, for on it will be the Sabbath to the Great Name.... It is for this reason that Scripture was more stringent regarding the Shmita than with respect to those guilty of violating all other negative commandments.... Whoever denies it does not acknowledge the work of creation and the World to Come." Hence the Sages said, "Exile comes to the world for idolatry, for sexual immorality, for murder, and for not letting the earth rest during the Shmita" (Pirkei Avot 5:9). By telling us that the Children of Israel were exiled because they failed to observe the Shmita, it follows that Scripture considers the transgression of the Shmita to be just as serious as the three gravest sins. Rashi wrote, "It is through the transgression of the Shmita that the Israelites are exiled, as the verse says: 'The land will appease its Sabbaths.... The land will rest and appease its Sabbaths.' The 70 years of the Babylonian exile corresponded to the 70 Shmita years that Israel did not observe" (Rashi on Vayikra 25:18).

Jeremiah said to the Children of Israel, "Thus says Hashem, the G-d of Israel: I sealed a covenant with your forefathers on the day that I took them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves, saying: 'At the outset of the seventh year, each of you shall send forth his Hebrew brother who will have been sold to you. He shall serve you for six years, and then you shall send him out free from yourself.' However your forefathers did not listen to Me, nor incline their ear... Therefore thus says Hashem: You did not hearken to Me to proclaim freedom, every man for his brother and every man for his fellow. Behold, I proclaim you to be free – the word of Hashem – for the sword, for pestilence, and for famine, and I shall make you an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Jeremiah 34:13-17). Rashi explains, "Behold, I proclaim you to be free – from Me, that I am not your master

to save you, and you shall be free for the sword and for famine."

This is difficult to understand. Why is Scripture so stringent regarding the mitzvah of the Shmita, to the point that the Children of Israel were exiled because they transgressed it? Why is transgressing the Shmita compared to the three gravest sins – idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder – for which we are to die rather than commit? After all, we are not obligated to die rather than transgress the Shmita! The words of the Ramban also need to be explained, for why is it more serious to deny the seventh year than to deny Hashem? With the exception of idolatry, we find nothing like this anywhere else in the Torah.

We shall try to explain all this according to a teaching of our Sages: "It is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the tzaddik shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]" (Makkot 24a). From here we learn that faith in Hashem is the foundation for the entire Torah. A person who possesses faith can accomplish all the mitzvot, for if he believes in Hashem, he will obey all that He commands him to do. The opposite is also true: Whoever does not possess faith cannot fulfill mitzvot. That being the case for mitzvot in general, how much more does it apply to the Shmita in particular! That is, whoever does not have faith in Hashem will not observe it, and whoever has faith in Him will observe it. This is because the power of the Shmita depends on faith, which frees a person from worry until the end of the seventh year, for he has faith that the Holy One, blessed be He, will fulfill His promise to those who observe the Shmita. Thus we read: "If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? See, we will not sow or gather in our crops!' I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it shall yield a crop for three years. You will sow in the eighth year, but you will still eat from the old crop until the ninth year" (Vayikra 25:20-22).

This is why the punishment for neglecting the Shmita is so severe. The Sages say, "Come and see how severe is the dust [i.e., results] of [transgressing] the seventh year" (Kiddushin 20a), and they explain that a man who trades his produce during the Shmita will eventually be forced to sell his moveable property. If he ignores this punishment, he will be forced to sell his fields, followed by his home, and even his own daughter. In the end, he will even have to sell himself to idolatry. A person who fails to respect the Shmita denies Hashem and will eventually become an actual idol worshipper. This is

because the Shmita is an essential principle of the Torah, being as important as the three most serious sins, for which we are to die rather than commit.

This is why Mount Sinai is mentioned in connection with the mitzvah of the Shmita. It teaches us that although the entire Torah comes from Sinai, the fact that it is mentioned in connection with the Shmita – which is an essential principle of the Torah – means that all the mitzvot are essential.

One may ask, "Is it only the mitzvah of the Shmita that depends on faith? Don't all the mitzvot require faith, as King David said: 'All Your mitzvot are faith' [Tehillim 119:86]?" The answer is that a mitzvah that does not imply a financial loss cannot be compared to a mitzvah that does imply a financial loss, and no mitzvah implies a greater potential for financial loss than does the Shmita. When a person has a field, but neither works nor sows it during the entire year because he is observing the Shmita, this indicates that he has faith in Hashem and trusts in His promises.

A person should not say, "Even if I don't observe all the mitzvot in practice, I still have faith!" Things do not work this way. Faith can only endure with a person who observes Torah and mitzvot. Hence immediately after Parsha Behar comes Parsha Bechukotai, which begins by stressing the value of learning Torah, as it is written: "If you walk in My decrees" (Vayikra 26:3). Here the Sages explain that the Holy One, blessed be He, yearns for the Children of Israel to study Torah (Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 1). We are taught that it is impossible to have faith without Torah, and likewise that it is impossible to have Torah without faith, for the two are connected. In this world, a person is like a builder who is constructing a house. How does he go about his task? He first lays a foundation, and afterwards he starts building a house upon it. How does he lay the foundation? He takes sand and earth, adds water to it, and with this mixture he prepares the foundation. If he fails to use these materials for the foundation, any house that he builds will end up collapsing. The same applies to Torah and faith. These are the two materials that form the foundation of man. If a person lacks both of them, he will not have a foundation, meaning that he will be unable to build anything that will last. If he builds something, it will end up collapsing.

This is the lesson that ensues from our parsha. The Torah says "on Mount Sinai" when speaking of the Shmita, thereby teaching us that faith without Torah is impossible, just as Torah without faith is impossible.

Allusions Contained in the Mitzvah of the Shmita

It is written, “When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath of rest for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field, and for six years you may prune your vineyard” (Vayikra 25:2-3).

Rabbeinu Chaim Vital writes in Etz HaDa’at Tov: “When you come into the land – when you descend from the world of souls into this world at the time that the embryo is created in the womb, which is formed in the innards of the mother from an element of dust called ‘land’; that I give you – for I caused this descent, as it is written: ‘Against your will you were created’ [Pirkei Avot 4:22]. It does not say that the soul was created by the Holy One, blessed be He, and that the body was created by one’s physical father and mother. Not so, for the body itself is created by the earth. It is I Who gives it to you, for everything is My handiwork. From the very start, I have given man and wife the power to produce a body, and therefore the body is also Mine. That being the case, just as I take pity on the soul after death, to give it a good reward and rest in the World to Come, I also take pity on the body. I therefore implore you to also take pity on your bodies by engaging in good deeds, so that after you die it will rest in the grave. This is the sense of the expression, ‘The earth will shall observe a Sabbath of rest.’ This is not a physical rest from work, for even the wicked rest from work in the grave, but rather a rest for Hashem, since rest comes from Him. Such is not the case for the body of the wicked, which will endure the judgment of Heaven by suffering in the grave. He lets us know just how the earth, which is the body, will be idle and rest by saying ‘for six years.’ Our lives are 70 years, and we still possess strength during our first 60 years because we have not reached old age. Hence for our first 60 years, we must sow our field, which is our portion in the land of life, our special place in Gan Eden. For six years we must prune our vineyard, cutting the bad branches that prevent the shoots from yielding their strength. This corresponds to ‘turn from evil,’ meaning from violating the prohibitions of the Torah.”

A Pearl From the Rav: You Shall Love your Fellow As Yourself

The Sages have taught, “Exile comes to the world for idolatry, for sexual immorality, for murder, and for not letting the earth rest during the Shmita” (Pirkei Avot 5:9). It would seem, therefore, that the mitzvah of the Shmita is so important that its transgression results in the

Jewish people’s exile from their land, which is as serious as the three gravest sins in the Torah. In fact our Sages have said, “Better for a man to cast himself into a fiery furnace than to shame his fellow in public” (Sotah 10b). Therefore shaming a person in public is among those transgressions for which one must be willing to die rather than commit. This means that unity among people weighs as much as the three gravest sins, which is why Scripture compared them to the Shmita. This is because the Shmita is a time of unity, when everyone descends into a field and takes whatever they like, and its owner cannot protest. Therefore just as for those sins which we must be willing to die rather than commit, we must also be willing to die for the mitzvah, “You shall love your fellow as yourself.” (If one objects to this by citing the saying of the Sages: “For every law of the Torah, if a man is commanded, ‘Transgress and you will not be killed,’ he may transgress and not be killed, except for idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder” [Sanhedrin 74a], Tosaphot explain that this is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah, and that the Gemara only takes explicitly mentioned sins into account.)

As Important as Yom Kippur

It is written, “The seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land” (Vayikra 25:4).

In the Chatam Sofer’s Sefer HaZikaron, in his sermon on the eve of Yom Kippur, he states that the word Shmita has a numerical value of 364. This teaches us that one who observes the Shmita for the entire year has the status of Yom Kippur, which is described by the term shabbaton. In fact the Sages have said that for 364 days of the year, the Satan has permission to accuse, but this permission is taken away on Yom Kippur (Yoma 20a). Hence one who observes the Shmita occupies a very lofty spiritual level, for the Satan has no permission to accuse him during the year. For such a person, the entire Shmita year is like a type of Yom Kippur, which is called a shabbaton.

All the Abundance of the Week Comes from Shabbat

It is written, “I will give your rains in their time” (Vayikra 26:4).

The Gemara explains that this occurs on the night of Shabbat (Taanith 23a). We may ask how the night of Shabbat differs from the nights of the week, as well as how Hashem can reward a person in this world for doing His will, since the Mishnah states: “There is no reward for mitzvot in this world” (Kiddushin 39b). It would seem that one who studies Torah during Shabbat receives a tremendous reward, more than for the Torah that he studies during the week. The Sages state that the Torah said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the universe, when the

Children of Israel will enter their land, this one will run to his vineyard and that one will run to his field, but what will become of me?” Hashem replied, “I will give you a partner called Shabbat, and on it they shall stop their work and study you” (Midrash cited by the Tur, Orach Chaim 290). What is written concerning the holy Sabbath? “G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (Bereshith 2:3). Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, sanctified and blessed the entire universe on Shabbat, He sanctified and blessed the Torah that man studies on Shabbat. He therefore gives him a material reward for the entire week on the night of Shabbat, which is why the Torah mentions materiality (rain) concerning Shabbat. This is because all the abundance of the week depends on the observance of Shabbat, as mentioned in the holy Zohar: “All blessings from above and from below depend upon the seventh day” (Zohar II:88a).

The Greatness of Torah Study

It is written, “If you walk in My decrees” (Vayikra 26:3).

Rashi states, “This means that you must toil in the study of Torah.”

The merit of one who studies Torah in poverty is exceedingly great. The Gemara cites Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Chiya as saying, “Any disciple of the Sages who occupies himself with Torah in poverty will have his prayer heard, as it is stated: ‘For a people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem. ... When He hears, He will answer you’ [Isaiah 30:19]. It continues, ‘Hashem will give you meager bread and scant water’ [v.20]” (Sotah 49a). Here Rashi explains: “For a people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem – these are the ones who study Torah, and of them it is said: When He hears, He will answer you. Meager bread – what is Scripture referring to here? To one who has a difficult time earning a living, but still studies Torah.” The Gemara continues: “Rabbi Abahu said: They also satisfy him with the splendor of the Shechinah.” In Chiddushei Aggadot, the Maharsha explains this to mean that Heaven will reveal the secrets of the Torah to such a person. The Gemara continues further: “Rabbi Acha ben Chanina said: Neither is the veil drawn before him, as it is said: ‘Your teacher will no longer be hidden’ [Isaiah 30:20].” Rabbeinu Chaim Falacci writes: “Although the gates of prayer are closed and the gates of tears remain open since the destruction of the Temple, the prayer of a Torah scholar who studies Torah in poverty will be heard, and he will not need to weep. Thus the prophet states, ‘For a people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem. You will not have to weep; He will surely show you grace at the sound of your outcry’ [Isaiah 30:19]” (Torah VeChaim 8:55).

Helping Those Who Falter Spiritually

It is written, “If your brother becomes poor and his means falter with you, you shall support him” (Vayikra 25:35).

We must realize that the mitzvah to support one who falters spiritually is no less important than supporting one who falters materially. Therefore if someone sees his friend doing something wrong, he is obligated to reprimand him. With regards to reprimands, it makes no difference whether a person is close or far, whether he is a simple man or a respected figure. All the opinions that we hear today from people – those who say that we must not get involved in the affairs of our neighbors, and especially not in the affairs of someone who we do not even know, for doing so is impolite and does not show good manners – all of it flies out the window. It is comparable to someone saying, “What right do I have to fulfill the mitzvah of helping someone who is staggering under a heavy load, since I don’t know him or have even said hello to him?” When it comes to doing good for others, superficial politeness has no place, for doing good is greater than politeness. The Sages have said, “Hoche’ach [reprimand] implies even a hundred times” (Bava Metzia 31a). This only seems to deal with a teacher’s duty towards his student. How do we know that it also deals with a student’s duty towards his teacher? It is from the repetition hoche’ach tochiach (“you will surely reprimand” – Vayikra 19:17). In the case of a student and his teacher, although a student must respect his teacher both according to the Torah and according to common norms, and although he can do this by minding his own business when speaking with his teacher, the Torah nevertheless tells the student not to mind his own business when it comes to his teacher’s personal affairs, up to 100 times if necessary.

– The Chafetz Chaim, Tzipita Lishua (Ma’amar HaTochecha)

Real Life Stories

The Blessing of the Tzaddikim

It is written, “I will command My blessing for you” (Vayikra 25:21).

I know of an incident that took place in my hometown of Zlotchov, where there was a person who was gravely ill. At the time, my teacher the holy gaon Rabbi Shalom of Belz Zatzal was spending Shabbat in the town of Brod. A dayan in Zlotchov allowed a non-Jew to write down the name of the sick person and that of his mother, and to send it to the Rebbe of Belz in Brod so he could pray for him. Our teacher the gaon Rabbi Shlomo Kluger Zatzal was very upset when he learned of this, dismissing the dayan from his duties as a result. My teacher the holy gaon of Belz was also upset with the person who wrote it, saying: “Now I’m forced to ensure that the sick person will be healed so that no desecration of Shabbat occurs on my account.” This is precisely what happened, for the person recovered from his illness. We must not be lenient in this area. Especially in our generation, there are many reasons not to be lenient, and regarding similar things it is said: “It is Shabbat, we must not weep. Healing is near, and Shabbat has the power to bring mercy.”

– Responsa Maharsham 2:225

Guard Your Tongue

Guard My Lips from Speaking Deceitfully

Just how devastating is the power of falsehood, which shortens the life of man, as it is written: “Men of bloodshed and deceit shall not live out half their days” (Tehillim 55:24)! Even during his lifetime, such a person will end up being scorned by everyone, since the Holy One, blessed be He, will make all the deceit that is hidden within his heart known to all, as it is written: “He who walks in innocence will walk securely, but one who perverts his ways will be discovered” (Mishlei 10:9). The Vilna Gaon explains that this refers to a person whose heart is filled with evil and whose lips speak deceitfully. He perverts his ways when he gets ready to perpetrate the evil within his heart on others, carrying it out in such a way that they are unaware of it. However his plan will eventually be discovered, for the Holy One, blessed be He, will make it known. Thus the Midrash Shocher Tov states that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not punish a person before making his deeds known. The evil that he plans on doing to others will end up returning to him, as it is written: “He who seeks good procures favor, but he who searches out evil, it will come upon him” (Mishlei 11:27). – Sefat Tamim 2

The Deeds of the Great

Chesed

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai once traveled to Jerusalem, with Rabbi Yehoshua following him. He saw the ruins of the Temple and said, “Woe to us, for the Temple has been destroyed, the place where our sins were forgiven.” He said to him, “My son, let this not be evil in your eyes, for we have another means of forgiveness that is equivalent, chesed [lovingkindness]. Hence it is written: ‘For I desire chesed, not sacrifice’ [Hosea 6:6] and ‘I said: The world is built by chesed’ [Tehillim 89:3].”

Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Tzadok were seated at the inn of Rabban Gamliel’s son. Rabban Gamliel offered a drink to Rabbi Eliezer, but he did not accept it, though Rabbi Yehoshua did. Rabbi Eliezer said to him, “What is this, Yehoshua? We are seated, while Rabban Gamliel is standing and serving us drinks?” Rabbi Yehoshua replied, “Let him serve. Abraham was among the greatest men in the world, and he served angels that he thought were idolatrous Arabs, as it is written: ‘He lifted his eyes and saw.’ If Abraham, who was among the greatest men in the world, served angels that he thought were idolatrous Arabs, how much more can Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi, serve us!” Rabbi Tzadok said to them, “G-d’s honor is disregarded, and yet you occupy yourselves with the honor of men? He by Whose word the world was created – He Who causes the winds to blow, the vapors to ascend, the rain to fall, and the earth to bring forth – sets a table for all of us, and shall Gamliel the son of Rabbi not serve us?”

Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were studying the section on the manna, with Rabbi Eleazar of Modim among them as well. Rabbi Eleazar said, “The manna that descended upon Israel was 60 cubits high.” Rabbi Tarfon said to him, “How long will you put words together and try to impress us?” He answered, “My master, I am expounding upon Scripture verses: ‘Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail, and the mountains were covered’ [Bereshith 7:20]. Now which measure is larger, that of reward or punishment? Certainly the measure of reward must be larger. Now regarding the measure of punishment, it is written: ‘The windows of heaven were opened’ [v.11], but with the measure of goodness it is said: ‘He commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and rained manna upon them to eat and gave them grain from heaven’ [Tehillim 78:23-24]. How many windows does a door have? Four. Hence ‘doors’ implies eight. Thus the manna that fell upon Israel was 60 cubits high!” – Yalkut Shemot 260

Fraudulently Obtained Wealth

It is written, “As the partridge broods over eggs that she did not lay, so is one who amasses wealth unjustly. In the midst of his days it will leave him, and at his end he will be considered a fool” (Jeremiah 17:11).

The Midrash states that the partridge takes the eggs of other birds and sits on them until they hatch. When the chicks hatch, they soon realize they are not of the same species and desert the partridge. Why does the partridge deserve this? Because it covered eggs that did not belong to it!

The Reshith Chochma writes in chapter Massa UMattan BaEmuna that a person who cannot be trusted in business will not rejoice in his lot. He who pursues wealth and struggles to acquire money dishonestly brings evil upon the world, as well as a tremendous amount of harm upon his body and possessions, as it is written: “One who is impatient to get rich will not go unpunished” (Mishlei 28:20). A curse will suddenly come upon his possessions, and all his money will disappear. He will depend on others, and of him it is said: “As the partridge broods over eggs that she did not lay.” How much better and enjoyable is the little that is acquired honestly and justly, than the much that is acquired dishonestly!

In Kuntras Middot UMishkalot and Shem Olam, the Chafetz Chaim states that a person must realize that the wealth he amasses dishonestly and by fraudulent means will leave him in the midst of his days. In other words, either his wealth will be abandoned by him in the midst of his days, or he will be abandoned by his wealth in the midst of his days. This means that either a person’s money will pass away or the person himself will pass away. Sometimes this occurs through illness and tragedy (G-d forbid), and such a person will experience more pain than the joy he felt in accumulating his wealth. In fact when wealth does not originate from Hashem’s blessing, such as when it occurs because a person transgressed Hashem’s will, he will experience misfortune at the same time as his wealth, and the more his wealth accumulates, the more his misfortunes will increase. This can occur, for example, through illness, concerns over children, by being attacked or robbed, and by all other hardships that people experience. The result will be that such a person will derive no satisfaction from his wealth.

Eishet Chayil

Faith in Hashem

King Solomon teaches us, “The Name of Hashem is a strong tower. The righteous one runs into it and is safe” (Mishlei 18:10). This verse means that a person who trusts in Hashem is like someone who finds himself in a fortified tower and dwells there in complete security. Thus he fears nobody, as it is written: “Hashem is with me, I have no fear. What can man do to me?” (Tehillim 118:6). The righteous run there and are safe from all problems. The verse states that Hashem’s Name is a “strong tower,” not a “high mountain,” for a strong tower was a tremendous necessity for men in times of war and distress, which is why Hashem’s Name is compared to it. A person’s faith in Hashem is what saves him from all troubles, as we read: “May Hashem answer you on the day of distress. May the Name of the G-d of Jacob defend you” (Tehillim 20:2). This is the strong tower in which people can find protection during difficult times.

– Rabbeinu Bechaye, Parsha Pinchas

The Jubilee

It is written, “You shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all the inhabitants. It shall be the Jubilee for you” (Vayikra 25:10).

Rashi explains that the mitzvah of this year carries a special name (“Jubilee”), a fact that sets it apart from all other years. It is called the Yovel (“Jubilee”) because the yovel (ram’s horn) is sounded on it.

Why is the Jubilee known as “the year of the sounding of the Shofar”? It is because by means of the great Shofar, the Jubilee prompts a spiritual awakening among all of us who are immersed in the vanities of this world and who think that our material acquisitions will be ours forever. During the Jubilee year, each person must return to his ancestral heritage and his family. For 50 years, a person develops the notion that the world belongs to him, as he accumulates wealth by the work of his hands and acquires material possessions. Since all his wealth comes to him by means of his work, he tends to forget that “all the earth is Mine” (Shemot 19:5). As such, his soul will be attached to his wealth. Then comes the Jubilee, at which point everything returns to its beginnings. The wind takes all his work away, leaving him with only the possessions that he did not work to acquire. These are his acquisitions. “A house and wealth are inherited from fathers” (Mishlei 19:14) – an inheritance that comes from Heaven without any effort on a person’s part. That is what belongs to him, while all the wealth that he acquired through his own effort returns to others.

Nothing awakens a person more than this. Hence it is written, “It shall be on that day that a great Shofar will be blown, and those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those cast away in the land of Egypt will come” (Isaiah 27:13). It is the “great Shofar” that can awaken even those who are lost in Assyria or cast away in Egypt. – From the Writings of Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

The Rebbe of Sanz

There was an uneducated Jewish tailor in Vienna who fashioned clothes for King Franz Joseph. A son was born to this tailor, and he asked the king to grant him the honor of being the Sandak at the circumcision. To his great surprise, the king accepted, and in his joy the tailor ran to the Rav of Vienna to tell him what had happened, asking him to welcome the king in synagogue. When the Rav heard this, he said: “What have you done? How can a non-Jew be a Sandak?” In his simplicity, the tailor replied: “But Rabbi, the king is kindhearted.” The Rav told the tailor that in his opinion, it was absolutely impossible for the king to be the Sandak. The tailor then threatened to go to church and convert if the Rav didn’t permit the circumcision to take place in synagogue with the king. The Rav was extremely upset by this, but he did not know what to do. He therefore sent a telegram to the Rebbe of Sanz, explaining that the situation was liable to result in the conversion of an entire family. That being the case, was he allowed to let the king be the Sandak? The Rebbe of Sanz answered him by telegram: “Let him convert, but do not allow this circumcision to take place in synagogue!” The Rav summoned the tailor, showed him the telegram, and said to him: “This is his decision. I cannot change it.” The tailor then went to the king and told him what the Rav had said, which is that he could not be the Sandak according to Jewish law. The tailor then told the king that he was ready to go to church and convert. The king smiled at him and said that it was not necessary, and that he would not be the Sandak. The tailor’s plans were therefore changed, and he did not convert. Instead he had the circumcision performed in synagogue, with the Rav serving as the Sandak. – Mishneh Halachot