



Greater Washington Community Kollel  
**SHABBOS  
 DELIGHTS**

**TORAH MINUTE**

IN MEMORY OF RABBI KALMAN WINTER ZT" L

*Coming Close to G-d*

Presented by Rabbi Hillel Shaps  
*Kollel Scholar and Director of Special Projects*

*"And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they came close before G-d, and they died" (16:1).*

The Parsha opens with a reference to the death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, whose passing was recorded back in Parshas Shemini (10:1). There, the Torah describes how Nadav and Avihu took incense and brought an "alien fire" before G-d, which was an apparent transgression and directly led to their untimely passing. In our Parsha, however, the Torah connects their coming "close before G-d" to their death. What is this referring to and how did this lead to their dying?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the cause of Nadav and Avihu's actions was their desire to exist on a level of spirituality that was beyond them at that time, rather than ascend the ladder of spirituality step by step. They brought themselves too close to G-d too quickly.

The lesson for us is self-evident. As each of us strives to develop our relationship with G-d, we must resist the urge to leap ahead and take on too much at once. Instead, we must elevate our spiritual connection in small increments. Indeed, setting our sights on monumental goals can even be counter-productive, causing us to delay our self-improvement or dissuading us from taking any action altogether. By taking an all or nothing attitude, we may become disillusioned at our progress and revert back to the same place we've always been. Committing ourselves to more manageable goals – such as one more mitzvah at a time or one more block of time to involve ourselves in Torah study – is a tried and true strategy for truly coming closer to G-d.

*Wishing you a Good Shabbos!*

## TABLE TALK

### POINT TO PONDER

#### **You shall love your fellow as yourself (19:18).**

A gentile who wished to convert approached Hillel and requested that it be dependent upon being taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel told him, "What you do not wish upon yourself, do not do to others. The rest of the Torah is just an explanation of this. Go study it" (Shabbos 31a).

How can one mitzva include all the other mitzvos? In addition, how can mitzvos that relate to interaction between people also include mitzvos which obligate man to Hashem?

### PARSHA RIDDLE

#### **When is one allowed to dilute a prohibited item?**

Please see next week's issue for the answer.

#### **Last week's riddle:**

Why do snakes have spots?

**Answer:** They were punished with tzaraas for speaking lashon hara against Hashem (Rabeinu Bachya).

## HATORAH V'HAMITZVAH

### HALACHA INSIGHTS FROM THE PARSHA

In both *parshiyos Acharei Mos* (18:3) and *Kedoshim* (20:23), we are prohibited from "walking in the ordinances" of the non-Jews. This prohibition is the basis of a controversy over the custom of decorating synagogues and homes on *Shavuos* with grasses, trees, and flowers. The *Maharil (Hilchos Shavuos)* records that (fragrant) grasses and flowers (*shoshanim*) were arrayed on synagogue floors "for the joy of the holiday." The *Magen Avraham (siman 494 s.k. 4)* records the placement of trees in synagogues and homes, which he suggests was intended as a reminder that on *Shavuos* we are judged regarding the fruits of the trees, and that we should pray for them.

The *Gaon* of Vilna reportedly opposed and abolished (at least locally) the custom of trees (and perhaps also that of grasses), since in contemporary times, the non-Jews have a similar custom on their holiday of "Pfungsten," i.e., the Christian Pentecost, which occurs fifty days after Easter Sunday, thus paralleling, and occurring around the same time as, *Shavuos*, the Jewish Pentecost (*Chayei Adam* 131(130):13, *Chochmas Adam* 89:1, *Aruch HaShulchan* OC 494:6, *Shut. Igros Moshe* YD 4:11:5).

But while a number of important *halachic* authorities, particularly within the "Lithuanian" / *yeshivah* tradition, follow the *Gaon's* position, other major authorities reject it, in reliance upon the doctrine that non-Jewish practices are not forbidden as long as they have a rational, legitimate basis. R. Yosef Shaul Nathanson relates that he queried the non-Jews about their reason for the custom, and received a response from "their elder" that it was merely for the purpose of "honor and adornment with beautiful trees." It therefore has a rational basis and is permitted (*Divrei Shaul / Yosef Daas* YD #348). R. Shalom Mordechai Schwadron justifies the custom based on the fact that we have a legitimate rationale for it, as a reminder of the judgment regarding the fruits of the trees (*Orchos Chaim siman 548 os 8* - see there for an additional basis for leniency). [R. Asher Weiss notes that the *Gaon* is on record as rejecting the doctrine that the existence of a rational basis legitimizes non-Jewish customs (*Biur HaGra* YD *siman* 178 s.k. 7), which explains his stringent position with regard to grasses and trees on *Shavuos* (*Minchas Asher Vayikra* 33:2).]

PRESENTED BY

RABBI YITZHAK GROSSMAN, ROSH CHABURAH

## KIDS KORNER

### WHO AM I?

#### **#1 WHO AM I?**

1. We are double.
2. Totally similar
3. Our end is different.
4. One would make the red white.

#### **#2 WHO AM I?**

1. I make you stand.
2. You must obey.
3. I give you long life.
4. Do not desecrate Shabbos.

#### **Last Week's Answers:**

**#1 Double Parshiyos** (We are double; when the month of happiness is double we are single; 14 becomes 7; we make davening longer.)

**#2 Sefira** (We start after "Shabbos"; you count on us; dazed and weak but not really; a good time for acapella.)

All children 13 and under who answer a "Who Am I?" correctly will be entered into a raffle to

*win*

**WATERPROOF NIGHT VISION BINOCULARS!**



*Congratulations to Rabbi Biberfeld's morning 6<sup>th</sup> graders and others for last week's correct answers!*

**Answer as many as you can.**

**Each correct answer will entitle you to another raffle ticket and increase your chances of winning! Visit gwckollel.org to submit your answers.**

THE NEXT RAFFLE WILL BE JUNE 6<sup>TH</sup>!

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