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A publication dedicated to Harbotzas Torah

Zmanim for שבת

Wesley Hills, NY

- 6:00 - פלג המנחה
- 7:03 - הדלקת נרות
- 7:21 - שקיעה
- 9:05 - זק"ש מ"א
- 9:41 - זק"ש גר"א
- 10:45 - סוף זמן תפילה
- 7:20 - שקיעה
- 8:02 - צאת הכוכבים
- 8:32 - צאת 72

Times courtesy of MyZmanim.com

Did You קצו?

The most common guard people place on their "gates" is the mezuzah. Mezuzos must be checked periodically to verify their kashrus as age, humidity, rain, and other factors may ruin a kosher mezuzah. Dwelling owners or renters are required to check their mezuzos twice in seven years. Mezuzos exposed to harsh elements like direct sunlight, a sprinkler system, etc. must be checked more often. Some meticulous individuals check all of their mezuzos every Elul. Often, people are lax about checking their mezuzos, claiming it is difficult to find a professional sofer to check, repair, and re-affix them in short order. This neglect should not be allowed to happen. If an examiner is not accessible, technically, anyone who reads Hebrew well and is familiar with the basic layout of a mezuzah can check if the letters have faded or cracked. A question on a specific letter would need to go to a qualified authority for a decision. However, this type of checking suffices only if the mezuzah was certified kosher at the time of purchase. [Unfortunately, buying a mezuzah from a Jewish-owned establishment is no automatic guarantee that the mezuzah is kosher.] When mezuzos are removed for checking for only a short time, there is no obligation to replace them with other mezuzos, nor is a blessing made when re-affixing them. When mezuzos are repaired or replaced, or they are removed overnight (according to many poskim, even when they are removed for more than several hours) a blessing should be recited when they are re-affixed. One blessing suffices for all mezuzos re-affixed at the same time.

Thought of the week:

We must learn to tailor our concepts to fit reality, instead of trying to stuff reality into our concepts.

Get Migdal Ohr via e-mail to share with others by writing to:
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”לא תטע לך אשרה כל עץ אצל מזבח אלקיך אשר תעשה לך” (דברים ט:זכא)

“Do not plant an Asherah for yourself [or] any tree near the altar of HaShem, your G-d, that you will make for yourself.”

The Ashera was a type of idol worship in which the tree was deified. Rashi says that one transgresses the sin of planting a tree near the altar as soon as he plants it, even if it was not yet used for idol worship. The Ramban explains that this prohibition refers to planting any tree, not only one for avoda zara, and suggests that the tree is called an Ashera as an identifier. He explains that the Torah here prohibits one from planting a tree near the altar of HaShem for beauty, thinking this is a means of enhancing the glory of the altar. Such an action is forbidden because it is the way of the idol worshipers to landscape their temples and places of worship.

An important aspect of this sin is the thought that one needs to add external beauty to the holiness of the Bais HaMikdash. Idol worshipers typically landscaped their temples to give visitors a sense of serenity or connection with nature, while cathedrals were often built as towering structures to induce awe. These external cues were intended to uplift the worshipers and put them in the proper frame of mind.

To believe that such things were necessary in the Bais HaMikdash is a sin, as one is supposed to connect with the Shechina, HaShem's holy countenance, directly. The holiness of the place provides an inner beauty unmatched by anything the external world has to offer. The Torah prohibits even this thought, as from the moment one begins to plant the tree, he has already minimized the kedusha of the place with the suggestion that it needs improvement.

The Sipurno underscores the message by stating that three things appear good to Man's perception, but are in actuality disgusting due to their spiritual blemishes. The first is the Ashera which appears to be lovely yet is repulsive because of its use in idol worship. Second is the upright stone monument which was desirable to G-d before the giving of the Torah. Once the sin of the Golden Calf took place, we were no longer on the level where the altar was appropriate. Finally, an animal which has a physical blemish that disqualifies it from being a korban, yet would not diminish its sale price in the market, seems to our eyes to be just as healthy, fat, and valuable as any other, yet it is reviled by Heaven.

The message from all these commentaries is that we must not be swayed by appearances or our physical perception. Rather, we must search for the truth as G-d sees it, and find beauty in what He calls beautiful. The words "for yourself" in this prohibition are used twice, perhaps alluding further to the mistake of focusing on what we feel to be proper.

This might also explain why this mitzvah is placed just after the prohibition for a judge to take a bribe to alter judgment. The essence of the two mitzvos is that man can err when he is motivated by his own thoughts of what is right, not by the guidance of HaKadosh Boruch Hu and His definition of right and reality.

A teacher chastised a student because he heard that the boy had not risen to give his seat to an older gentleman on the bus. A visitor to the school was quite impressed, until he discovered that the teacher was an atheist.

“By what right is that old man entitled to the seat?” he asked the teacher. “What do you mean?!” replied the astonished teacher, “everyone knows that one must respect his elders.”

“Who says?” answered the visitor. “If I were the boy I could make the case that I am the future of the world. I am going to contribute to society while this man has done all he shall and is now nothing but a drain on society’s resources. He should give his seat up to me!”

*The teacher was dumbfounded and couldn't reply. “The answer,” said the visitor, “is that my argument only works as long as we're basing our decisions on logic. But as Jews, we don't work that way. G-d said, “You shall rise before an elder,” and so we do. **That's** why he had to give up his seat on the bus.”*