

TERUMAH (EXODUS 25:1-27:19)

Go for the Gold!

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Fast of Esther

Next Thursday, February 25, is a fast day. The Fast of Esther usually takes place on the day before Purim. However, this year Purim falls on a Sunday, and we don't fast on Shabbos (with the exception of Yom Kippur.) Therefore, the fast is scheduled early. The fast commemorates the war of the Jews of the Persian Empire against their enemies that took place on that date. In keeping with Jewish tradition, the Jews repented and fasted in hope for G-d's assistance in battling their enemies. Let us pray that He will continue to watch over us and protect us.

The fast begins Thursday at dawn, (72 minutes before sunrise.) It ends at dusk, (25-72 minutes after sunset, depending upon local custom.) For sunrise and sunset times for your community [click here](#).

“Go for the Gold”

This week we are introduced to the *Mishkan*, the portable Tabernacle that served as the Temple in the desert.

“They will make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.” (Exodus, 25:8)

Midrash Tanchumah (Terumah 8) tells us that this Mitzvah was given to Moses on the “first” Yom Kippur. Moses had spent 40 days on Mount Sinai begging G-d to forgive Israel for the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf. On the 40th day, the 10th of Tishrei, Moses came down from the mountain with a replacement set of Tablets. This was a sign that G-d had accepted his prayers and had forgiven Israel.

That forgiveness came at a price: *“They will make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.”* G-d wanted to demonstrate to the world, by “dwelling” among the Israelites, that they had atoned for the sin of the golden Calf.

The Midrash states: This is why it was called “The Tabernacle of Testimony,” since it testifies to the world that G-d dwells in your Temple. G-d said, “Let the gold in the Tabernacle come and atone for the gold that was used for the Calf...”

The beautiful Tabernacle that stood in the desert was there to undo the damage of a devastating sin.

I was really pleased with the train of events. Last August G-d blessed me with a grandson. A week later I performed his Bris, and three weeks later, I witnessed his Pidyon HaBen. In December, G-d blessed me with a grandson. A week later I performed his Bris, and three weeks later, I witnessed his Pidyon HaBen. Boruch Hashem! Thank G-d, my family merited all these Simchas in such quick succession.

We've been outdone!

When I perform a Bris, I usually don't stay for the celebratory meal. I give the mother instructions on care of the baby, check him to make sure everything is stable, wish them Mazel Tov, and go on my way. This week, I made an exception. I stayed for the meal that celebrated a "full" Bris, a "partial" Bris, and two Pidyon HaBens!

The first Bris was "on time." For medical reasons, the original Bris date had to be cancelled. Once the baby was cleared for circumcision by his doctor last Wednesday, we had to wait a week and schedule the Bris for the new "eighth" day, which was the following Wednesday. (NOTE: Sometimes the Bris may be done immediately after the baby is cleared by the doctor.) Wednesday also happened to be the 31st day of the baby's life, qualifying him for his Pidyon HaBen.

The baby has a relative whose parents had originally opted for circumcision by a doctor, which does not meet the requirements of a Bris. So, after I performed the Bris of the younger cousin, I drew a drop of blood from the circumcision site of the older cousin in what is considered, for all intents and purposes, an "upgrade." He now has a "real" Bris. He, too, is a firstborn. He, too, had his Pidyon HaBen.

Wednesday was not a day of total, unbridled joy; there was some sadness too. A half-day before, on Tuesday night, Martin Grossman was killed.

Martin Grossman, as many on my mailing list are aware, was a murderer. In 1984, this then-19-year-old drug addict ended the life of a young wildlife officer. He was found guilty and condemned to die. A diverse group of community activists organized to appeal to the governor of Florida to commute the sentence to life in prison without parole. Tuesday night that effort failed. Martin Grossman is dead.

[My point right now is not to comment on the merits or demerits of the case or the wisdom of Jewish communal leaders speaking up over a particular case of interest to the Jewish community. That is, perhaps, a discussion for another day.]

I believe that when Martin Grossman died, his soul went straight to Heaven to receive his rewards the Mitzvahs he did in his lifetime.

What's that you say? He was a murderer? What about the pain that he caused to that police officer and her family? Why should he go to Heaven? Shouldn't he pay for his terrible sin?!

Yes, he should. He did. He was punished severely.

Martin Grossman reportedly was a model prisoner. He expressed remorse for his actions. Many of the reports I read indicated that he turned his life around in prison. He felt guilty over the pain that he caused. He met with rabbis. He prayed. He repented.

Martin Grossman's final statement:

"I would like to extend my heartfelt remorse to the victim's family," he said. "I fully regret everything that occurred that night, for everything that was done, whether I remember it or not."

Then he recited the Shema. Then he died.

Among the prayers that are recited before one dies is the request that his death should serve as atonement for all his sins. Martin Grossman sinned. Martin Grossman was executed. His sin, I believe, has been atoned for. He meets G-d with a clean slate.

It is not always easy to do the right thing. All of us, in one way or another, fall short of our requirements.

The People of Israel sinned egregiously by turning their gold into an idol. That act caused irreversible repercussions that we still feel today. But all was not lost. "Take your gold and turn it into a Tabernacle," said G-d. "That will be your means of achieving atonement."

A Bris is supposed to be done by a Mohel, not a doctor. There is more to having a Bris than not having a foreskin. But the damage is not irreparable; blood can be drawn later to provide the child with a delayed welcome to the Covenant.

A murderer cannot bring back his victim, nor can he heal the broken hearts of her family. But he can find a way to bring meaning and righteousness to the rest of his life.

I recently invited an 80+-year-old man to put on Tefillin. "But I'm reform!" he said. "I haven't put on Tefillin since my Bar Mitzvah!"

"Where does it say in the Torah, the Talmud, or the Shulchan Aruch," I asked, "that someone who's reform is not allowed to put on Tefillin?!"

What we did or didn't do yesterday is much less important than what we will do or not do tomorrow.

A Golden Calf can become a Golden Tabernacle. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Be an “Olympian!” Go for the gold! At today’s prices it’s worth even more than it used to be!

Have a great Shabbos.

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