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By the Hakham

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## Parashath Ki These: Building Fences Around Ourselves

It says in Parashath Ki These: כִּי תִבְנֶה לְגִגְדְּךָ בֵּית חָדָשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מִצְעָה לְגִגְדְּךָ "If you build a new house, you must make a fence for your roof."

This can be understood on a different level. The month of Elul is a time for introspection and Teshubah (repentance). Our bodies are like the house where the soul dwells. Someone who repents properly becomes a new entity - a new house for the soul.

The danger that anyone who repents faces, is the prospect of regressing. The best advice one could give someone who repents correctly not to regress, is to build a "fence for the roof". Our Hakhamim made fences for us around the Torah, by forbidding us to do something which is similar to a Torah prohibition but, nevertheless, permitted by the Torah, lest we should inadvertently come to do that which is forbidden by the Torah. We, in turn, should go one step further and make additional fences for ourselves by building fences to forbid even that which was permitted by the Hakhamim.

In this way, if a person stumbles and transgresses one of his self built fences, he does not transgress an actual law from the Torah or the Hakhamim, but only the fence that he built for himself.

(See Addereth Eliyahu, Parashath Ki These)



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## Which Child Should Hold the Candle?

13th Elul, is the day of the passing of M"R Hakham Yosef Hayyim, zy'a"n, the Ben Ish Hai.

When Hakham Yosef Hayyim, 'a"n, was about eight years old, he and his sister were arguing as to who should hold the candle for the Habdalah on Saturday night. Their father, Hakham Eliyahu Hayyim, 'a"n, turned to his young son Yosef and told him that if his reason for holding the candle was for mere pleasure, then his sister should take precedence, because she was the younger one. If, on the other hand, it was because he had a deeper understanding of the meaning of Habdalah, then he could be the one to hold it.

The young Yosef answered that Habdalah shows the distinction between the holy and the profane, Israel and the nations of the world and the Shabbath and the rest of the week, which proved that he had an understanding of the subject. His father, however, was not satisfied with this answer. He would ask him one more question before deciding.

"Why" he asked, "is the order of Habdalah that first there is the wine, then Besamim (scent), followed by the candle and at the end Hamabdil (separation)?" Since the separation is the most important, should it not have come right after the wine? The young Yosef thought about it for a moment and answered that his father himself had taught him that the essence of a Jew is to strive to constantly grow. For that reason we start with the mouth (wine), then go up to the nose (scent), then go further up to the eyes (looking at the flame), and finally, the blessing of separation which is connected with understanding, which is the brain. The father was astonished by his eight year old son and let him hold the candle.

(See Ari MiBabel [the Lion from Babylon])

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## Paper Towels on Shabbath

Paper towels and napkins that are made for one time use, may be used on Shabbath, to wipe one's hands or to wipe water that spilled on the table. The reason is that people do not use the paper towels, then squeeze out the water and use them again. They are simply thrown away after the first use.

If, however, the paper is very thick and is used several times, they fall into the category of cloth as far as Seḥita (squeezing) is concerned. As a result, they may not be used to wipe water off the table on Shabbath. According to the Shulḥan 'Arukh, before wiping one's hands, one must rub each one on the other, and then wipe them on the towel. According to the Qabbalah, each hand must be rubbed three times any time one does Neṭilath Yadayim.

(See Derekh HaTorah, 17:20-21, Melekheth Dash)

## Logically, Repentance Should Not Work

The whole concept of Teshubah (repentance), is very hard to comprehend. Logically, it should be compared to taking a glass cup and throwing it on the floor and smashing it to smithereens. If a person would then confess to wrong doing by saying, "Ḥaṭathi, 'Awithi, Pasha'ti", the cup would not then miraculously restore itself to its original unbroken condition. But repentance does just that. Even if a person sinned and destroyed spiritual worlds, if he repents, his repentance is accepted.

The Yeser Hara' (evil inclination), tries to distance a person from making Teshubah (repenting), by telling him that it is far too difficult for him to achieve. The Torah tells us the opposite. It lets us know that it is easy to do. It is not something far away in Heaven but is in our mouths and in our hearts to do.

The one prerequisite, however, is it should not just be lip service, but that the person must truly desire to repent and give up his former ways.

(See Dibrei Mordekhai, Parashath Niṣabim, Befikha Ubbilabkha La'asotho)

## Women's Corner - by Rabbanith Ruth Menashe 'a"ḥ

### Acquiring Intent in Our Prayer, Part 1

We are told, in the name of Rabbenu Ḥayyim Wiṭal, 'a"ḥ, the student of the Ari z"l, 'a"ḥ, that as special as prayer is, as we get closer to the coming of the Mashiyah, it will have an even more special meaning. Therefore, we should make it our business to chase after, improve and polish our prayer.

People often ask: how is it possible to pray with the proper intent and concentration, when there are so many distractions and obstacles standing in the way.

One important principle, which may help, is to actually visualize and feel as if we are standing in front of the Holy One blessed be He. We should try to feel and sense His greatness, His might, His loving kindness and mercy. It is not an easy task, in fact it is quite a difficult one, because we cannot actually see our Creator.

Perhaps we should introspect and ask ourselves whether we are focusing on ourselves or G-d while we pray. Do we feed our own self importance, or realize that we are actually nothing, especially when we are standing in front of Him.

(To be continued)