



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בשלח 5769 חיי תשס"ט

THE IMPENETRABLE BOUNDARIES

Last week's discussion focused on the ideal that characterized the emergence of the Jewish nation: the commitment to fulfill Hashem's Will *at all costs*. When the call to freedom from their interminable bondage finally came, B'nei Yisrael did not budge, for they had been instructed by Hashem to remain indoors until daybreak, in observance of the Pesach rituals. Heeding this restriction jeopardized their opportunity for deliverance, yet they did not hesitate. As our nation was born, the course that was set for the future was clear: allegiance to the Torah is paramount; all other considerations are secondary, at best.

As we shall discover, this theme continues in this week's *parshah*. To lay the groundwork, it is necessary to first discuss certain "technical issues." Ultimately, the principle emerges in a most dramatic way.

THE TECHUM

In addition to the well-known thirty-nine forms of forbidden labor, there are other restrictions to which the Sabbath observer must adhere. Among them are the limitations on travel, (even by foot) which are mentioned in the *parshah*.

"A man shall not go out from his place on the seventh day," (*Shemos 16:29*). The Torah does not intend to confine a person to one spot for the entire day. Rather, as the Gemara (*Eruvin 51a*) explains, the verse refers to the "*techum Shabbos*," the "Sabbath boundary." This boundary extends 2,000 cubits – in all directions – beyond the city limits and represents the area within which one may travel, but beyond which he may not traverse.

Restrictions apply with regard to leaving – and entering – the *techum*. Generally speaking, a person

traveling to a particular location should make sure to enter the confines of the *techum* of his destination *before Shabbos begins* (to avoid being stranded outside for the duration of *Shabbos*). As the Mishnah (*Eruvin 4:11*) states:

מי שְׁהִחְשִׁיךְ חוץ לְתַחוּם, אֶפְלוּ אָמָה אַחַת, לֹא יִכָּנֵס.
"If someone finds himself even one cubit short of entering the *techum* at the onset of *Shabbos*, he may not enter."

HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION – COSMIC RAMIFICATIONS

The Gemara (*ibid. 43a*) considers an interesting question relating to these "border crossings." Ten *tefachim* (handbreadths) is a measurement that bears a particular significance in many areas of *halachah*, including the laws governing *Shabbos*. And so the Talmudic sages wonder: Do the restrictions of the *Shabbos techum* apply even *above* a height of ten *tefachim*, or is such a height deemed to be a "safe zone," unaffected by the regular *techum* restrictions?

Obviously, a traveler on foot cannot simply walk across the *techum*. The essence of the Gemara's query is this: What if – somehow – a person was able to make himself airborne (on *Shabbos*), such that he was traveling more than ten *tefachim* above the ground; *could he* cross over at such a height?

At first glance something seems odd about this question: when would it ever be applicable? What type of superhuman would be able to simply "levitate" across the *techum*?

From the Gemara's ensuing discussion, it becomes clear that a vital event hinges upon the outcome of this question: namely, the arrival of Moshiach himself.

As stated above, only someone who was within the confines of a city's *techum* before *Shabbos* began could traverse within it. A wayfarer from outside is

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unable to enter if he did not clear the *techum's* boundary before *Shabbos*. And so the Gemara's question essentially boils down to the following: Moshiach will be dispatched by Heaven as soon as the Jewish people are worthy. What happens, however, if they reach this state on the Sabbath itself? Could Moshiach still "arrive," or would he be prevented from doing so because of *techum*-related issues? If the *techum* restrictions are limited to a height below ten *tefachim*, Moshiach may be able to contravene the boundary by gliding into town. If, however, the boundary extends even heavenward – including the space above ten *tefachim* – Moshiach would be forced to turn back.

HALACHAH: TO WHAT EXTENT?

Quoting the Brisker Rav, R' Elya Ber Wachtfogel reflected on the sheer magnitude of the lesson that emerges from this Gemara. For – as stated – the practical outcome of the Gemara's hypothetical

discussion is that we may very well have a situation in which the Moshiach is poised and ready to descend but is prevented from doing so because of the *halachah* of *techum Shabbos*. This holds true despite the fact that by the time *Shabbos* is over, the spiritual level of the Jews may have changed and that window for Deliverance – for now – will have been closed.

Consider this scenario: what would have happened if Moshiach actually *had* arrived to deliver our nation some thousand years ago or so? How much would the course of Jewish history been altered? How much heartache, persecution, and suffering would have been avoided? Expulsions, wanderings, persecution, blood libels, pogroms, mass murder – even assimilation – would have all been prevented had the Redemption been sanctioned many years ago! The Gemara teaches us that it is possible that Moshiach was actually on his way, ready to come; he was ready to usher in the era that would have spared us so much tragedy; and yet, at the last moment, he was prevented from doing so.

What could stop him from carrying out such a vital mission? The *techum Shabbos*. If it extends upward, Moshiach will not enter. You or I might have thought differently; surely, a holy and earth-shattering rescue mission of such cosmic proportions would take precedence over the mere "technicalities" delineated in a Gemara in Eruvin concerning the projections of *techum Shabbos*!

However, Chazal demonstrate otherwise. Following the lead of our forefathers in Egypt, they teach us that our first allegiance is to Hashem and the fulfillment of His Will, regardless of the consequences.

Our nation was founded on this ideal; and it is our adherence to this principle that continues to preserve us. Throughout history, elements have arisen who advocated compromise and dilution of the Torah's laws. And throughout history, they have assimilated and all but faded into oblivion. It is precisely those faithful servants of Hashem, who maintain an unswerving loyalty to His Torah, that ensure the continued vibrant existence of the Jewish nation.

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