



Vayeira

The Most Irrelevant Instruction?

In Jewish law, this appears to be the most irrelevant instruction. In the Shulchan Auruch, Orach Chaim, chapter 218, we are given details of blessings, and our sages tell us that when one is standing at a place where a terrible tragedy took place, we should recite the bracha of Dayan Ha'emet, blessing God who is the true judge. And then if one is standing at a place where a great miracle took place, one recites the blessing in which one praises God for saving people's lives.

It is in that context that the Shulchan Auruch says, if you happen to be in the area of the Dead Sea and you come across the pillar of salt which was once Lot's wife, then you recite two blessings. First of all, Dayan Ha'emet, because that is where she died and it is in that area that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and other cities perished. But also, you should recite a blessing through which we praise God, who performed a great miracle, because it was right in that place where Lot and his daughters were saved.

Now, what are the chances that you, or I, or anybody, might actually come across the pillar of salt which used to be Lot's wife? I think it is practically zero! Yet, this is a halacha in our code of Jewish law!

But actually, here our Rabbis are imparting an exceptionally important message to us about the rhythm of life.

In Jewish history, tragically, we have had so many awful experiences and at the same time, God has continued to bless the Jewish people always. Is that not what we have experienced since Shmini Atzeret, 7th of October of 2023? And right now, we continue to mourn the loss of people, to identify with former hostages and others who have suffered so bitterly. We look Heavenwards and we say God, You are the Dayan Emet, You are the true judge. But together with this, we recognise how many extraordinary miracles have happened to individuals, to families, to communities, to the state of Israel and to the Jewish people. This is what the rhythm of Jewish life is all about.

So, at those moments when we feel so low, when we contemplate the awful scenarios which we have endured, let us not forget to highlight the incredible extent to which Hashem has truly been with our people, and has saved us. From that pillar of salt, let us draw inspiration by recognising how great Almighty God is, to guarantee that Am Yisrael Chai.

Shabbat Shalom.