

**MORASHAH**  
**THE RABBINIC FELLOWSHIP OF THE UTJ**  
 811 Palisade Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666  
[www.utj.org](http://www.utj.org) 201.801.0707

Rabbi Moshe P. Weisblum, Ph.D.

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

Parashat Vayikra

This week, we started the month of Nissan. This means that Pesach will be here very soon. There is a well-known tradition that every firstborn son should fast the day before Passover. The reason is to commemorate God's extreme punishment of the Egyptians with the tenth plague, His ultimate punishment, the slaying of the firstborn Egyptian sons. Every Hebrew family that followed God's instruction to mark their doorpost with lamb's blood was spared.

In commemoration of the tenth plague, we follow the custom of requiring every firstborn male to fast the day before Pesach. Because Erev Pesach requires a lot of special preparations, it may be very hard to fast at that time. Therefore, the Sages created a substitute custom, which is called a *Siyum*. This means that instead of fasting, one may substitute the completion (*Siyum*) of studying a portion of Talmud, or at the very least, one may participate with a study group that completes a Talmudic tractate on that day. Right after the *Siyum*, at the conclusion of the study period, we have a special meal in honor of the completion of the tractate, and firstborn males are permitted to participate, in celebration of the *Siyum*.

I would like to share with you a story, one that I witnessed twelve years ago. It occurred on the eve of Passover when I was called to be the tenth man for a *Siyum* in the home of one of the oldest rabbis in Israel. His name is Rabbi Dov Be'er Eliezerov, who, now in his upper 90's, is known to be a tremendously pious man. He studies day and night. His appearance is still vivid to me. He had a long white beard, a Chassidic hat and long black coat, and a face that looked like the great Rembrandt portrait of the sage and righteous.

It was a tremendous honor and a special occasion for me to sit with such a great man to partake in his *Siyum* the night before Passover. It was 2 AM and we were studying, when suddenly from outside a knock and moan were heard at Rabbi Eliezerov's front door. A friend of mine, Rabbi Glick, opened the door and to his surprise found a large dog sitting there. He closed the door and returned to the table. Moments later, moaning and banging were heard again. Again, Rabbi Glick opened the door and saw the dog. He chuckled, closed the door and returned to the table. Seconds later, we heard the same intense moaning and banging. This time, I went to the door and saw the dog. He had a very strange and woebegone expression. I decided to leave the

---

*Rabbi Weisblum is rabbi of Congregation Kneseth Israel, Annapolis, Maryland.*

The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.

All *Divrei Torah* can be found at <http://www.utj.org/Torah/HaShavuah>

door open and upon returning to the table, explained to the old Rabbi what had happened.

The old Rabbi ordered that the dog should be allowed to enter the room, and the dog eagerly walked in. The dog immediately focused on Rabbi Eliezerov and sat near him, licking his shoes and rubbing his head against his legs, crying at the same time. The Rabbi took careful note of the dog and finished the *Siyum*. He then summoned each member of the group to rise. We didn't understand the reason for this, and thought the whole scene was somewhat weird. In a serious tone, Rabbi Eliezerov ordered the group to say, "I forgive you" (in Hebrew 'salachti') to the dog. In disbelief, but out of great respect for the Rabbi everyone complied. When the group finished, the Rabbi told the dog, "Go in Peace and Rest in Peace." Having heard those words, the dog picked itself up, left the room and was not heard from again. After the *Siyum*, upon leaving the Rabbi's house, we discovered the dog lying dead outside the building near the steps.

This happened on the Eve of Passover. I feel that this story illustrates what our sages have told us – that the soul given to each person comes directly from God. Sometimes a soul can migrate into an animal to fulfill its mission in this world. We never know where a soul may be found. Judaism teaches us that because our concept of the total world is sometimes limited and incomplete we should never pass final judgment on anyone. The sages emphasize that we should be circumspect and deliberate in all of our judgments. In the case of the dog, a soul was undoubtedly returned to receive final forgiveness from one of the greatest, most righteous men of our time. Spirituality is all around us. We must only look carefully to see it everywhere.

I wish you a kosher and a *freilech* Pesach.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

---

The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.

All *Divrei Torah* can be found at <http://www.utj.org/Torah/HaShavuah>