

CENTER FOR MODERN TORAH LEADERSHIP

Center for Modern Torah Leadership



חירות ואחריות

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"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

WEEK FIVE SUMMARY OF SBM 2017

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If you firmly believe that you are *mashiach*, are you a *shoteh*? Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe* 1:120) deal precisely with this question. Rav Moshe was faced with this issue in 5679. The man in question believed that he was *mashiach* and that he was thus destined to save the Jewish people. He had an obsession with serving as *shaliach tzibur* and *ba'al kriah* and would fight with all his might to be able to be in those roles. On one occasion he stole the sefer Torah and went running with it into the street screaming about how he was going to fix the world. Lest one believe that these were his only strange behaviors, this man would also hang out in trees and walk around town without clothing, claiming that he was like Adam before the sin. However, it is important to note that in all other behaviors Mr. *Mashiach* was a perfectly reasonable and sane human being.

By the time that the man was ready to be married, he was working as an elementary school teacher and had not displayed any worrying behaviors for many years. The marriage went on completely without issue. Unfortunately, soon after his marriage the man reverted to publicly stating that he was *mashiach* and returned to going about his strange behaviors. Two years before the writing of Rav Moshe's *teshuva*, the man went to his father's house to work as a farmer. Since then, he had not displayed any of his crazy behaviors. Believing him to be completely back to normal, the man was taken to give his wife a *get*. All went according to plan, but on the way out of the proceedings, the man remarked to Rav Moshe that he still believed himself to be

mashiach. Rav Moshe then had to determine whether or not the *get* that was given was a valid one, or if it was invalid due to having been given by a *shoteh*. After all, the second chapter of Mishna *Gittin* clearly lists a *shoteh* as one who is invalid to give a *get*. Perhaps the man's *get* can still be considered valid since the man's only irrational behaviors stem from his one incorrect belief that he is *mashiach*? This idea is hard to reconcile with the Rambam, who writes in Mishneh Torah *Hilchot Eidut* that one who is a *shoteh* for one matter is considered to be a *shoteh* in all matters, even if he is entirely rational when it comes to those other matters.

The question of whether or not this man is a *shoteh* hinges upon the gemara in Chagiga which discusses the criteria that are necessary in order to deem one to be a *shoteh*. Rav Huna posits that to be considered a *shoteh* one needs to go outside alone at night, sleep in a graveyard, and tear his clothing. In other words, if someone only performed one or two of those actions, there could easily be a logical reason for it. Rav Huna's opinion is necessary, according to Rav Moshe, to show that a person performing all three of those actions is so unlikely to be doing them all for a logical reason that they must be assumed to be a *shoteh*. According to the gemara in Chagiga then, the man in question may not be considered a *shoteh* because all of his actions have logical reasons, stemming naturally from the one false belief that he is *mashiach*.

The issue with this reading of the gemara is that the Rambam states in *Hilchot Eidut* that a shoteh in one matter is considered to be a shoteh in all matters. The Rambam clearly states that such a person is invalid as a witness and, on top of that, that they do not have a chiyuv in any mitzvot! Rav Moshe interprets the Rambam as saying that the Torah does not give people only a partial chiyuv in mitzvot. Either a person is subject to all mitzvot or they are not subject to mitzvot at all. It is this lack of obligation that disqualifies their testimony. Interestingly, Rav Moshe moves on to say that this overwhelming disqualification is ONLY with regard to testimony and obligation in mitzvot. In all other areas of Halacha, Rav Moshe claims that even the Rambam would agree that one irrational belief (and the actions which stem from it) would not make one a shoteh in regards to all of the matters which they have rationality with. Therefore the man who believed that he was mashiach would be able to give his wife a get without issue even if he is a shoteh.

We then moved on to the path towards helping a shoteh recover from their illness through the words of Rav Yitzchok Zilbershtein, who discussed whether one is permitted to violate Shabbat in order to heal a shoteh resulting in him or her then being in a position where he or she is chayav in mitzvot. For this, Rav Zilbershtein laid out three potential possibilities.

1. It is completely permitted to heal a Shoteh on Shabbat. This position was brought down from the Beit Meir, who stated that the reason that one can violate Shabbat to save any life is the principle of violating one Shabbat so that the person saved can keep more Shabbatot. The person, being healed from being a *shoteh*, would then be in a position to keep Shabbat in a way that they would have been unable to before when they were not *chayav* in *mitzvot*.

2. It would not be permitted to heal a shoteh on Shabbat at all. This is supported by the Biur Halacha since the mental condition of the shoteh is not enough to be considered a physical danger and allow the permission to save a life on Shabbat to take affect.
3. It is permitted to heal a shoteh on Shabbat, but only when there is absolutely no doubt that the shoteh will actually be healed. This approach is based on the Netziv in Ha'amek Sh'elah, who argues that the principle of violating one Shabbat to allow others to be observed is a second justification for violating Shabbat to save life but applies only when the outcome is definite. This principle allows violating Shabbat even when no life is in danger, only the capacity to be *chayav* in *mitzvot*. Ordinary life-saving is justified by the verse "and they shall live by them"; it requires physical danger but applies even when there is only a possibility of death.

We also noted a halakhic irony: it seems that the more valuable the shoteh is before being healed, the more difficult it is to permit healing him or her if that healing involves violating Shabbat. Some of us thought this was perfectly reasonable while some of us thought it was counterintuitive. We also disagreed as to whether and to what extent our intuitions were relevant to the process of deciding the Halachah. This conversation was an excellent preparation for writing our teshuvot next week.