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Alone in a Cell But Not Forgotten

During the Jews' 40-year journey in the desert, two major cases of capital punishment were recorded. The first, mentioned in this week's parasha, involved the individual who uttered blasphemous words against Hashem, known as the mekallel. The second case occurred at the end of Parshas Shelach, when an individual violated Shabbos.

Rashi notes that both transgressors were incarcerated at the same time, yet they were not placed in the same cell. Why? Rashi answers that while the courts were certain the Shabbos violator would receive the death penalty—though unsure which of the four forms it would take—they were uncertain whether the mekallel would be sentenced to death at all. This uncertainty necessitated separate cells.

Rashi does not explain why this uncertainty necessitated separate cells.

The Sifsei Chachami explains that if the mekallel were placed in the same cell as the Shabbos violator, who was certainly facing execution, he might assume that he, too, was destined for the death penalty. This would cause undue mental



R' HENOCH WITH HIS FATHER R' DOVID



LEFT - RAV LEIBOWITZ. MIDDLE - RAV MOSHE CHAIT. RIGHT - RAV KANAREK

ר' אלתר
חנוך
הענאך
בן דוד
לייבאוויטש

Rav Altar
Chanoch
Henoah
Leibowitz

(1918-10 Nissan 2008)
an only child, was born in 1918 in Salcininkai, Lithuania (near Kovna). His father, Rav Dovid, a nephew of the Chofetz Chaim arrived in America in the 1920s when he was hired by Mesivta Torah Vodaas. In 1933, Rav Dovid founded Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yisrael Meir HaKohen. His father's death in 1941 left him in charge of the fledgling yeshiva while still in his early 20s. He married the granddaughter of Rav Naftali Trop.

anguish, as he would mistakenly believe his fate was sealed when, in reality, he would be sentenced to death was still uncertain.

Rav Alter Chanoch Henoah Leibowitz questions why they could not simply place them together and explicitly inform the mekallel that his sentence was uncertain. He answers that there was a concern that, despite being told otherwise, the mekallel would still assume that sharing a cell with someone condemned to death meant he was in the same position. Additionally, Rav Leibowitz cites the Tosafos, that one reason for the uncertainty surrounding the mekallel's punishment, was the possibility that his transgression was so severe that a human court's death penalty might not suffice.

This teaches a profound lesson about sensitivity to others' feelings. Even in a case where someone may deserve the harshest punishment, we are so careful with his feelings that, even explicitly informing him that he may not receive the death penalty isn't enough—just in case he doesn't believe it.

Even though he committed an act so egregious that execution may be inadequate, they were careful not to place him in a situation that could cause unnecessary emotional turmoil. We must be so careful with others' feelings, no matter their status or how unlikely it may seem that they would be affected.

Rav Chaim Ephraim Zaitchik cites this Rashi and reaches the same conclusion (*Hamadah Vahachim* page 217¹).



R' ZAITCHIK

ר' חיים אפרים זייטשיק R' Chaim

Ephraim Zaitchik (1906- 9 Adar 2, 1989) was born near Minsk. At 14 he joined the Novardok system. He opened a Novardok in Butchatch in the 1930s. He married Leah Warman who was a teacher in the "Beis Yaakov" school and the daughter of R' Yisrael who was the Rav nearby. Leah was the great-granddaughter of Rav Yichiel Michel Hibner. He was in Siberia enduring excruciating circumstances. After, he went to France and helped R' Gershon Liebman who he remained close with his entire life. Later in America he joined Novardok in Boro Park, before moving to Eretz Yisrael (1963). He published many sefarim. Buried on Har Zeisim.

1 באוראה עד כמה העמיקה וכו' לא לגרם חלילה לצער מיותר ונוסף שצער ומבוכת הזולת.

RAV ALTER CHANOCH HENOCH LEIBOWITZ'S SHIURIM were known for their lively atmosphere. He encouraged students to ask questions freely and engage in debate without waiting for the end of the class. He wanted them to defend their positions passionately. Once, during a particularly heated discussion, a student, caught in the heat of the moment, inadvertently spoke disrespectfully to the Rosh Yeshivah. The room fell silent as everyone realized the student, in his excitement, had crossed a line. The tension lasted only a moment, as Rav Leibowitz immediately stood up, recognizing the student's embarrassment, and instead of reacting with offense, embraced the student, reassuring him that he understood it was an honest mistake.

Through this act, Rav Leibowitz imparted a powerful lesson: a student's embarrassment was far worse than any personal slight to his own honor. His response left a lasting impression on his students, who carry this lesson with them to this day.