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HaRav Yosef Grossman zt"l

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PERSONAL SPACE: MAY ONE DEPART PLANET EARTH?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

The Associated Press reports:

A tech billionaire performed the first private spacewalk hundreds of miles above Earth on Thursday, a high-risk endeavor reserved for professional astronauts—until now.

Tech entrepreneur Jared Isaacman teamed up with SpaceX to test the company's brand new spacesuits on his chartered flight. The daring feat also saw SpaceX engineer Sarah Gillis going out once Isaacman was safely back inside.

This spacewalk was simple and quick—the hatch was open barely a half hour—compared with the drawn-out affairs conducted by NASA. Astronauts at the International Space Station often need to move across the sprawling complex for repairs, always traveling in pairs and lugging gear. Station spacewalks can last seven to eight hours; this one clocked in at less than two hours...More and more wealthy passengers are plunking down huge sums for rides aboard private rockets to experience a few minutes of weightlessness. Others have spent tens of millions to stay in space for days or even weeks. Space experts and risk analysts say it's inevitable that some will seek the thrill of spacewalking, deemed one of the most dangerous parts of spaceflight after launch and reentry, but also the most soul stirring...

Until Thursday, only 263 people had conducted a spacewalk, representing 12 countries. The Soviet Union's Alexei Leonov kicked it off in 1965, followed a few months later by NASA's Ed White.¹

The Torah perspective on space travel was first considered more than sixty years ago, while the Space Race was afoot between the United States and the Soviet Union as a cold battle in the Cold War. In 5722/1962, R' Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch wrote:

A member of Congress asked a certain *rav* whether according to the holy Torah it is permitted to travel to the moon and other planets, and to settle people there if possible.

Although the ones responsible for these efforts do not listen to *da'as* Torah, we should nevertheless not leave the questioner empty-handed. In Sanhedrin 109a it says: "R' Yirmiyah bar Elazar said: They (the Generation of the Dispersion) split into three groups: One said, 'Let us ascend the tower and reside there.'... It was taught in a *breisa*: R' Nosson says: All of them intended (to build the tower) for the purpose of idolatry."

It follows that were it not for the intention of idol worship, this faction would not have been guilty of



PARSHAS NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH

WRITE ANGLES

Excerpted and adapted from a *shiur* by Dayan Yosef Greenwald

So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, place it in their mouth...

Dvarim 31:19

The Rambam says that the mitzvah to write a sefer Torah, derived from this *pasuk*, requires that one write it for himself. If he cannot do so, he must hire a *sofer* to write it on his behalf (Hilchos Sefer Torah perek 7). By contrast, the Rosh (Menachos, Hilchos Sefer Torah) understands that the mitzvah is to have a sefer Torah in one's possession, in order to study it. Because today we study Torah from printed *sfarim*, *Acharonim* say the Rosh would hold the mitzvah is fulfilled with them instead.

The *Acharonim* ask that the Rambam appears to contradict himself in Sefer Hamitzvos, where he writes that one can fulfill the mitzvah by buying a sefer Torah from someone else, even if that person did not write it for him. This would seem to imply that the mitzvah is to have a sefer Torah rather than to write it. Moreover, we do not find any other mitzvah that is fulfilled just once in a

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any sin. This is also implied by the text of Yeshayah 14:13-15, that the sin of Nevuchadnetzar, who said "I will ascend higher than the stars of G-d..." was that his intent was, "I will liken myself to the Most High"...

It seems apparent from all this that we should not consider sinful that which the Americans are striving to reach the moon, because they are not doing so in arrogance vis-à-vis Hashem, as the Reds are indeed

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Full Blast

Q If I heard a cough or a sneeze during a shofar blast, was I *yotzei*?

A There is a general rule that *trei kalei lo mishtam'ei* (two simultaneous sounds are not discerned). But shofar and other audio mitzvos that recur only annually are different: Because listeners are more attentive to them, they hear the mitzvah sound over competing sounds (Rosh Hashanah 27a). Still, if the noise was loud enough to overwhelm the shofar, you were not *yotzei*.

Tekiah is frequently blown longer than is required. (The minimum duration is the length of its corresponding *shvarim*, *truah*, or *shvarim-truah*.) If the coughing was brief, and you had already

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Q&A from the
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doing.² By “the Reds,” Rav Rabinovitch presumably had in mind people like Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who reportedly said in a speech before Communist Party bosses that cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin “flew to space but saw no G-d there.”³

Seven years later, in reaction to “a great and historic event that occurred in our world”—the Apollo 11 moon landing—R’ Menachem Mendel Kasher published Ha’adam Al Hayareiach (Man on the Moon), which considers a variety of theological, philosophical, and halachic questions related to the moon in general and the moon landing in particular. One page is devoted to the question of whether there is any objection from Torah *hashkofah* to landing on the moon, “as people think there is, based on the *pasuk*, ‘As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem’s; but the earth He has given to mankind,’⁴ and because it is similar to what we find regarding the Generation of the Dispersion.” Rav Kasher cites an early text, which he believes to be either a midrash of Chazal or a commentary of Rav Sa’adiah Gaon, that states: “‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’⁵—to teach you that people are forbidden to reside anywhere but on the earth.” Rav Kasher, citing earlier sources, explains that “the earth” in this context is to the exclusion of the *water*, and the problem is the danger of living anywhere other than terra firma. He proceeds to consider the application of this to moon landings:

And according to this, it is possible that it is prohibited to land on the moon, because it is forbidden for a person to endanger his life,⁶ but from the *pasuk* “be fruitful and multiply” there is no proof, because it is possible that the prohibition is only to reside, i.e., to *live* in such a place, but there is no proof that to land and return is prohibited.

This is not comparable to those who traveled to discover the lands of the United States, which was then considered dangerous, because this was included in Hashem’s command of “fill the earth and subdue it,”⁷ and many thousands of years passed before people discovered [the Americas]...But on the moon, where there is not naturally any air for breathing, as required for human life, this demonstrates that it is not a place for humans to live. It falls under the aforementioned rule that people are forbidden to reside anywhere but on the earth, until the time comes—if we believe that such a time will come—that this will no longer be considered dangerous.

And all our discussion is with regard to the landing itself. But of course this should also be discussed from another perspective, that by such a landing a person prevents himself from fulfilling the laws of the Torah, because it is impossible to fulfill them on the moon in the current situation.⁸

R’ Moshe Sternbuch indeed prohibits space travel on the grounds that it is impossible to fulfill time-dependent mitzvos there:

They recently sent a spaceship outside Earth. In it a person reaches space, and he orbits around the entire world about sixteen times a day, and there is no concept of time there as we are accustomed to

in the world. And since it has been publicized that there is a Jew (Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon) among the travelers, *talmidei* chachamim have investigated what the law of the Torah is regarding this trip with respect to the times of Shabbos, Yamim Tovim, *tfilah*, and so forth. Although this issue is not currently practical, it is nevertheless appropriate to consider this law.

It appears that we have received the Torah with the times as they are in our world, and one who departs this world has removed himself from time-dependent mitzvos, like Shabbos and Yamim Tovim, or day and night with respect to the recitation of Shma and *tfilah*, and it is prohibited to remove oneself from the obligations of the Torah, because we serve Hashem to keep His mitzvos.⁹

Despite Rav Sternbuch’s belief that “one who departs this world has removed himself from time-dependent mitzvos,” he does proceed to provide some guidelines for Torah observance in space.

Ilan Ramon asked R’ Tzvi Konikov of Cape Canaveral (the location of the Kennedy Space Center, from which Ramon’s fatal mission launched) how to observe Shabbos in space. He passed the question along to R’ Levi Yitzchak Halperin, who wrote an initial *teshuvah* on the topic and eventually published a longer work titled “If I Ascend to Heaven.”¹⁰

Rav Sternbuch proceeds to argue that space travel is a pointless and unjustifiable waste of money:

The truth is that besides this, there is here a terrible waste of hundreds of billions of dollars in order to show the greatness of America. Even if this has some benefit for humanity, it is very small, but they are prepared to pay any price in order to boast and compete with other nations. With the money they invest they would be able to save tens of thousands who are dying of hunger. The Nation of Hashem should not join or partner with them, because it is not our way to waste so much on mere sightseeing, and we should not demonstrate with our participation our endorsement of such things.

Rav Sternbuch’s economic argument is powerful, but perhaps not entirely compelling. On the one hand, expenditures on space exploration have indeed been immense:

Since its inception, the US has spent nearly \$650 billion on NASA. When adjusted for inflation this amounts to around \$117 trillion. Add to this Russia, China, and other countries that have space programs, and the figure will probably well exceed \$2 trillion. The UN estimates that it would cost \$30 billion per year to solve world hunger and make massive improvements to the lives of close to a billion people.

But on the other hand,

Space exploration has given us so much, not least GPS navigation. The list of other life improvements is long and includes: infrared ear thermometers, ventricular assist devices, cochlear implants, artificial limbs, light-emitting diodes, invisible braces, scratch-resistant lenses, space blankets, 3D food printing, aircraft anti-icing systems, improved radial tires, chemical detection, video enhancing and analysis systems,

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heard a sufficient length of the *tekiah, poskim* debate whether you fulfilled the mitzvah (Shulehan Aruch O.C. 587:3). The halacha follows the stringent view, that a *tekiah* cannot be interrupted, but a *bracha* should not be recited when repeating it (Mishnah Brurah *ibid.* 15).



RAV ARYEH FINKEL

This halacha applies to *shvarim* and *truah* too, even though they are broken sounds (Ritva cited by Elef Hamagein *ibid.* 5).

You don’t always have to make up a missing shofar blast after davening. In shul, the shofar is sounded in two stages, before Musaf and during Musaf, one of which is *de’Oreisa* and the other is *deRababan* (Rosh Hashanah 16a). A third stage, at the end of davening, fulfills the minhag to complete 100 blasts.

Because one of the first two stages is a *takanas tzibur* rather than an obligation of the individual, if you missed a blast during the first stage, you can make it up at the second, and vice versa (see Chazon Ish 137:4).

If you missed a *shvarim-truah* sequence, you may need to hear it again, depending on your shul’s minhag: The *Rishonim* debate whether *shvarim-truah* is done in one breath or two, so both variations must be heard (See Rama 590:4 and Sha’ar Hatziyun *ibid.* 18). In most shuls, the *shvarim-truachs* of the first stage are done in one breath and those of the second in two. So if you missed a single-breath *shvarim-truah*, you should hear it again after davening. In some shuls, the *shvarim-truachs* of the third stage are once again done in one breath, so you can make it up then.

landmine removal, fire-resistant reinforcement, firefighting equipment, shock absorbers for buildings, Tempur foam, enriched baby food, portable cordless vacuums, freeze drying, CMOS image sensors, air scrubbers, Bowflex, water purification, solar cells, pollution remediation, correcting for GPS signal errors, water location, structural analysis computer software, remotely controlled ovens, powdered lubricants, improved mine safety, improved food safety, and gold plating.¹¹

A question, of course, is whether the world could have obtained these technologies by spending a mere fraction of the resources it has devoted to space travel directly on such useful research, while skipping the actual space travel and utilizing the remainder of the budget more practically and usefully.

2Hadarom, Choveress 15 (Nisan 5722) p. 121.

3Here and here.

4Tehillim 115:16.

5Bereishis 1:28.

6We have discussed this principle in a number of previous articles in this forum: Hurricane Housing: When a Storm is the Norm. Sep. 20, 2018; Value Judgment: What’s a Life Worth? Sep. 17, 2020; Risk Factors: Can You Be Too Safe? Jul. 15, 2021; Pool Rules and Road Codes: Safety in Halacha. Sep. 2, 2022.

7Bereishis *ibid.*

8R’ Menachem Mendel Kasher, Ha’adam Al Hayareiach, pp. 59-60.

9Shu”T Teshuvos Vehanhagos cheilek 5 siman 84. (cited here).

10Tehillim 139:8. For additional sources and discussion of the topic of the fulfillment of time-dependent mitzvos in space, see: Ha’adam Al Hayareiach *parek* 5 pp. 51-55; R’ Yehudah David Bleich, Contemporary Halachic Problems Vol. V Ch. III, Mitzvos in the Polar Regions and in Earth Orbit; R’ Yosef Fund, Out of this World, The Bais Havaad Halacha Center, Halacha and Space, Yeshivas Kerem B’Yavneh; R’ Anthony Manning, Halachic and Hashkafic Issues in Contemporary Society: 157-Halacha in Extreme Places, Part 3-The Final Frontier? Mitzvos in Space; Kiyum Mitzvos BeChalal, Olamot; For it is not in Heaven...or is it? On the Halakhos and Hashkafos of Space Travel, Kol Hamevaser, Feb. 24, 2016.

11Halachic and Hashkafic Issues in Contemporary Society *ibid.*

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person’s life. It would therefore seem that the Rambam agrees with the Rosh that the essence of the mitzvah is to learn and perpetuate Torah, but he maintains that one

must do the mitzvah act of actually writing the sefer.

The Bahag does not count writing a sefer Torah as a mitzvah. *Acharonim* explain that he understands it to be included in the mitzvah of *talmud*

Torah. This is also the reason the Rambam, unlike the Ramban, does not count *Birkas* HaTorah as its own mitzvah.

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