

REMEMBERING

Rabbi Yehuda Henkin זצ"ל

Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin passed away on the 10th of Tevet this year at the age of 75. Rabbi Henkin made *aliyah* with his wife, Rabbanit Chana Henkin, to Emek Beit She'an, where he served as communal rabbi for a number of years before the family moved to Yerushalayim. He and his wife founded Midreshet Nishmat.

Through his books and initiatives, Rabbi Henkin revolutionized women's roles in Torah learning and religious life.

Rabbi Henkin named his published compilation of halachic responsa *Shut Bnei Banim* (literally, "sons of sons"), a reference to his relationship with his grandfather Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, a prominent American *posek* of the previous generation. His rulings were characterized by a combination of his encyclopedic knowledge and loyalty to halacha on one hand and an understanding of the changes and needs of the modern world.

He also wrote a number of other books on topics such as *tzniut*, gender roles in halacha, and the weekly *parasha*.

Rav Henkin's halachic rulings were unique. In some areas, he was more stringent than the majority, and in others, more lenient. He ruled what he believed to be the truth. For example:

- Drumming on the table on Shabbat is prohibited (חלק א סימן יב).
- Women can say *kaddish* in the synagogue from the women's section (חלק ב סימן ז).
- A kosher *mechitza* must be tied to the ground, and therefore he prohibited using a hanging curtain as a *mechitza* in the synagogue (חלק ב סימן יב-יג).
- A woman can read from the *ketuba* at a wedding, in a place where women regularly hold public positions (חלק ג סימן כז).
- *Kol isha* does not apply over the radio (חלק ב סימן ריא וחלק ג סימן קכז).

G-d is Watching

In Parashat Eikev, the Torah contrasts the water supplies of Egypt and Canaan. In Egypt, fields are irrigated by the Nile, but in Canaan, the Land "drinks water from the rain of heaven" (Devarim 11:10). The Ramban explains that agriculture is not easier in the Land of Israel. Quite the contrary. The Nile provides a reliable year-round water supply while in Israel one depends on seasonal rainfall. This, however, forces Israel to observe the commandments, or else G-d will withhold rain!

The Torah continues that Israel is a Land which "G-d cares for ... the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (11:12). One can be of two minds about this. There are those who would probably prefer that G-d not be looking over their shoulders, so to speak. In fact, Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (13th century) wrote that sinners should stay away: it is one thing to sin outside of Israel, but quite another to rebel against the King inside His own palace! At first glance, Rabbi Meir's statement contradicts a Midrash

which quotes G-d as saying: "Even if they profane it, would that they were in their Land!" But there is no contradiction. On the individual level, sinners should stay away, but as a nation, Israel is the only place for the Jewish people.

G-d's special attention to the Land of Israel boils down to this: the destiny of the Jewish people was, is and will be forged by what happens there. No place else on earth can make that claim.

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