

THE BAIS HAVAAD

HALACHA JOURNAL

Family, Business, and Jewish Life through the Prism of Halacha



A PUBLICATION OF THE
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Dedicated in loving memory of
 HaRav Yosef Grossman zt"l

VOLUME 5782 • ISSUE II • PARSHAS NO'ACH



LINE OF DISSENT: SHOULD A BAIS DIN DISCLOSE THAT ITS VERDICT WASN'T UNANIMOUS?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor recently warned an audience of law students about the frustration of having to write dissents:

"There is going to be a lot of disappointment in the law, a huge amount," she said Wednesday at an event hosted by the American Bar Association. "Look at me, look at my dissents."¹

PUBLISHING DISSENTS

The writing and publishing of dissents is actually a major point of divergence between traditional halachic judicial procedure and its modern Western counterpart; while it is standard practice in the latter, it is unequivocally forbidden by the Mishnah:

¹ Ariane de Vogue, Justice Sonia Sotomayor: 'There is going to be a lot of disappointment in the law, a huge amount.' CNN Politics. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/29/politics/sonia-sotomayor/index.html>.

And from where is it derived that when the judge leaves the courtroom he may not say, "I deemed you exempt and my colleagues deemed you liable, but what can I do, as my colleagues outnumbered me and consequently you were deemed liable?" About this it is stated: "You shall not go as a talebearer among your people" (Vayikra 19:16), and it says: "One who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but one who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Mishlei 11:13).²

The Gemara cites several different opinions as to how a split decision is recorded:

When there is a dispute among the judges, how do they write the verdict? R' Yochanan says they write that he is exempt, without mentioning the dispute. Reish Lakish says

² Sanhedrin 37. Cf. Kovetz Haposkim Vol. 2 pp. 41-44. (continued on page 2)



PARSHAS NO'ACH

BY HIS OWN HAND

Excerpted and adapted from a shiur by
 Dayan Yosef Greenwald

But your blood, of your souls, I will demand; from the hand of every animal I will demand it, and from the hand of man, from the hand of each man, his brother, I will demand the soul of man.

Bereishis 9:22

The Gemara (Bava Kama 91) interprets this *pasuk* to include a prohibition of suicide, and it equates suicide with murder: Since one does not own his body, as it belongs to Hashem, he has no right to take his own life. In fact, the Rambam in *Hilchos Rotzeiach* writes that one who commits suicide is not *chayav misah*, but it does seem that the act of suicide is considered a *ma'asei retzichah* (an act of murder). (See, though, *Minchas Chinuch* 34:5 and *Bais Meir* Y.D. 215:5.)

In light of these sources, it is difficult to understand how Sha'ul Hamelech asked his assistant to kill him while in battle with the Plishtim (Shmuel I 31:4) and, when he was refused, killed himself.

The Bach and Shach (Y.D. 157, citing the Smak) answer that (continued on page 2)

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Lunch and Learn

Q During my lunch break, I leave work and go to a local bais midrash to learn. May I eat a snack there?

A The Shulchan Aruch says that it is forbidden to eat and drink in a bais midrash or bais knessess (O.C. 151:1) because doing so, among other mundane activities he lists, is considered degrading to the holiness of the place.

One exception is mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch (ibid.): A *talmid* chacham may eat (continued on page 2)

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that they specify: "So-and-so and so-and-so deem him exempt, and so-and-so and so-and-so deem him liable," they must mention that there was a dispute. R' Eliezer says that they do not specify the names of the judges, but rather they add, "From the statement of the judges, so-and-so was deemed exempt" to the wording of the verdict. This indicates that not all the judges agreed that he is exempt but does not specify which judges came to which conclusion.

What is the difference between these opinions, besides the wording of the verdict?...the difference between the opinions is...due to the prohibition of "You shall not go as a talebearer among your people" (Vayikra 19:16).

R' Yochanan says that they write that he is exempt, due to the prohibition of gossip, as derived from the *pasuk*, "You shall not go as a talebearer."

Reish Lakish says they specify: "So-and-so and so-and-so deem him exempt, and so-and-so and so-and-so deem him liable," because otherwise the document would have the appearance of falsehood, as not all the judges deemed him exempt.

And R' Elazar accepts the opinion of this Sage, R' Yochanan, and accepts the opinion of that Sage, Reish Lakish. Therefore, this is what they write: "From the statement of the judges, so-and-so was deemed exempt." This wording indicates that the ruling was not based on a consensus among the judges, so that it will not have the appearance of falsehood, but it also does not specify what each judge said, to avoid gossip.³

The halacha follows the view of R' Elazar.⁴ Some suggest that if the judges agree to specify the identity of the dissenting judge, there is no prohibition of talebearing.⁵

³ Ibid. 30a.

⁴ Shulchan Aruch *ibid.* *se'if* 2.

⁵ Seder Hadin (Yerushalayim 5770) p. 241 s.v. *Yevesh le'ayein*. The practice of the batei din of the official Israeli rabbinat—whose members have included some of the most distinguished *gedolei* Torah of the past century, such as R' Betzalel Zolty, R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and R' Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg—is to issue Western-style verdicts, including legal reasoning and (signed) dissenting opinions, in apparent blatant violation of the halacha. (See here.) A possible justification is that since this is the standard practice, any *dayan* who chooses to participate in the system implicitly accepts its rules and norms and thus waives his right to anonymity. I recall having seen many years ago a discussion of the application of the halachos discussed here to contemporary batei din by R' Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, possibly in a responsum addressed to Zerach

The Sma understands that the wording of "from the statement of..." specifically indicates a split decision, and so it should not be used in the case of a unanimous verdict.⁶ R' Yonasan Eybeschutz, however, disagrees and explains that this wording is consistent with a split decision as well as a unanimous verdict, and we deliberately use ambiguous language to avoid revealing to the litigants whether the decision was unanimous or not.⁷

CRITICIZING JUDICIAL VERDICTS

R' Eizik Stein adds that the prohibition against talebearing includes declaring to a litigant that "the judge acted unfairly to you in holding you liable."⁸ R' Chaim Benveniste qualifies that this extension only forbids a third party from volunteering his assessment of the ruling on his own initiative, but if he is consulted by the litigant, and he realizes that the judge has erred in such a way that the verdict is subject to reversal, there is no prohibition whatsoever in disclosing this to the litigant.⁹

It is difficult to understand why an error that renders the verdict subject to reversal should not be disclosed to the litigant even on one's own initiative, and indeed the Sha'ar Mishpat maintains, based on a responsum of the Rosh,¹⁰ that it is actually a mitzvah to disclose such errors even on one's own initiative, and R' Eizik Stein was only referring to errors that are not grounds for the verdict's reversal.¹¹

R' Yonasan Eybeschutz considers it obvious that disclosing an error that does not render the verdict subject to reversal constitutes *lashon hara*, and he is uncertain whether even one that does should be disclosed to the litigant. (He does not distinguish between disclosure in response to a

Warhaftig (see the latter's *Takanot HaRabbanut Harashit!*), but I have been unable to locate it at this time. As we have previously discussed (The Bais HaVaad Halacha Journal, Volume 5777 Issue XXXV Shlach) a similar argument is made by Rav Waldenberg (Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer *cheilek* 16 *siman* 67), as well as by earlier authorities, in justification of the modern judicial appellate system.

⁶ Ibid. s.k. 3.

⁷ Urim Vetumim *ibid.* Urim s.k. 4. Cf. Shu"t Chavos Ya'ir *siman* 147, cited in *Pis'chei Teshuvah* *ibid.* s.k. 4 (and cf. Urim Vetumim cited in the following note); Sha'ar Mishpat *ibid.* s.k. 2; Aruch Hashulchan *ibid.* *se'if* 2; Seder Hadin pp. 241-242; R' Ohad Fixler, Da'as Miut.

⁸ Biur R' Eizik Stein to Smag *laviv* #9, cited by Bach C.M. *siman* 19. Shach (*ibid.* s.k. 2) objects to R' Eizik's proof to this from the Gemara, but it is unclear whether he is rejecting his position itself.

⁹ Knesses Hagedolah *ibid.* Hagahos Tur s.k. 3, cited by Ketzos Hachoshen *ibid.* s.k. 1.

¹⁰ Shu"t HaRosh *klal* 99 *siman* 6, cited by Tur C.M. *siman* 154. Cf. Shu"t Maharashdam C.M. *siman* 40 s.v. *Shuv kasav vehidafis psako*.

¹¹ Sha'ar Mishpat *ibid.* s.k. 1, cited in *Pis'chei Teshuvah* *ibid.* s.k. 1.

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and drink in a bais midrash so as not to waste time from his studies.

The *poskim* write that this exception is not limited to *talmidei* chachamim; any person who routinely studies in a bais midrash is included in this exception if his learning will be disturbed by having to relocate in order to eat. So you may indeed eat your snack while you learn (*Piskei Teshuvos* *ibid.*).

Many batei midrash today are established initially on the condition that they may be used for other purposes (per *Shulchan Aruch* *ibid.* 11). Still, the dignity of the bais midrash must be preserved, so one may only eat a *seudas* mitzvah, e.g., *Shalosh Seudos*, a *siyum*, etc. (*Mishnah Brurah* *ibid.* 20; see also Sha'ar Hatziyun *ibid.*). But eating and drinking for non-mitzvah purposes, *sichah beteilah* (idle talk, which would include business phone calls), and similar mundane activities are still forbidden despite the stipulation.

Note that the dispensation to eat in the bais midrash while learning only obtains for the duration of your learning session. Once you finish learning, you must finish your food elsewhere, as you're no longer involved in Torah study.



RAV ARYEH FINKEL

consultation by the litigant and disclosure on one's own initiative.) He recommends that one act stringently and initially approach not the litigant but the judge himself, point out the error, and request that he reverse his ruling. Only if the judge obstinately refuses to concede his error should he disclose it to the litigant, in order that other scholars may clarify the matter and nullify an erroneous ruling.¹²

¹² Urim Vetumim *ibid.* Urim s.k. 2. Cf. *Pis'chei Teshuvah* *ibid.*

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Sha'ul was afraid that the Plishtim would force him to worship idols. In order to prevent this, he was allowed to kill himself. The Ritva (Avodah Zarah 18a, citing the Gilyonei Tosafos) agrees, writing that it is permitted to kill

oneself first to avoid possibly violating one of the three cardinal *aveiros*.

The Radak and Ralbag answer that Sha'ul could commit suicide because he knew he would be killed in that battle, and he preferred to die quickly at his own hand rather than be tortured to death by his foes. The *Shulchan Aruch* (Y.D. 345, in the halachos of *aveilus* for a suicide) appears to accept this as

well, as he considers Sha'ul's case to be one of *ones* (compulsion by circumstances). But he does not specify that it was due to the concern of idol worship.

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