

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



CAN I KEEP THE COINS?

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha, Behar, talks about the prohibition of Ona'as Mamon, of cheating in business. This leads us to the following true story.

Ephraim was a kohen. As we know, a kohen has a mitzvah to preside over a pidyon haben. The pidyon haben is where the father of a firstborn son gives five silver coins to a kohen to redeem his firstborn. Our Sages explain that one of the ideas behind this mitzvah is that really a first born son is supposed to serve in the Beis Hamikdash. However, the firstborns were disqualified to do the service in the Beis Hamikdash after the sin of the Golden Calf. The son has to be redeemed with five silver coins because he can no longer do the service and has to return to a normal status.

Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch writes



CONTINUOUS DESTINATIONS

In my involvement with Baltimore's Russian speaking Jewish community people often ask me how many people have become observant. Their question suggests that if a family has not yet reached mitzvah observance they have not accomplished anything. I would like to share an insight from Rashi in this week's Parsha, Bechukosai, which will perhaps change that perspective.

The Torah warns us of the unimaginable tragedies that will befall our people if we leave the ways of Torah. In explaining the decline of our people from being fully connected to HaShem to becoming entirely alienated from Him, Rashi identifies seven steps of digression. The first step is that we are no longer committed to studying His Torah fastidiously which leads to not performing His mitzvos which leads to hating others who do perform the mitzvos which leads to hating Torah scholars which leads to preventing others from performing the mitzvos which leads to denying HaShem's commanding those mitzvos which leads to the ultimate of denying the existence of HaShem.

As Rashi enumerates the seven steps of digression he identifies each one as another sin. In other words, each step is a sin of its own. The implication is that if we reversed our steps each one would be a mitzvah. So that if someone started from bottom and progressed up to the top each step would be a mitzvah in its own right .

Let us apply this notion to people who were raised in a highly anti-religious environment. In their home and in their native country there was pervasive atheism

that one lesson behind this mitzvah is that a firstborn is to be reminded that even though he can not technically do the service in the Beis Hamikdash, his status as being the role model and spiritual leader of the family remains and the firstborn son is to always be cognizant that he is to be an example for the rest of his siblings.

So back to our story about Ephraim. Ephraim presided over many pidoyon habens over the years. From scores of families, he received the five silver coins to redeem their sons.

But a great challenge arose. When Ephraim was in his seventies he learned that his mother was married and quickly divorced before she married his father. His mother was a gerusha when she married his father the kohen. A kohen is not allowed to marry a divorcee and consequently Ephraim was a challal, not a kohen, and he was not allowed to redeem the firstborn sons.

Ephraim now had two pressing questions to answer.

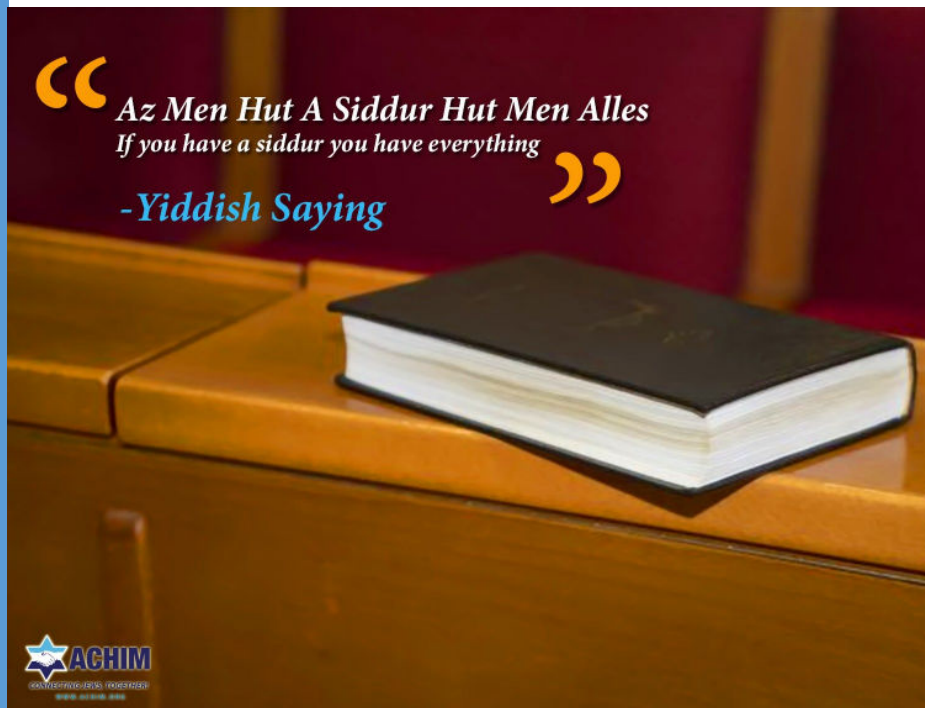
Number one, did he have to return the pidyon haben money to all of the families that used him over the years?

Number two, were all of his pidyon habens counted as nothing? Do all of the firstborn sons have to do pidyon haben all over again, now that they are adults?

This question was brought before Rav Zilberstein.

What do you think?

See Chashukei Chemed Pesachim 421



where anyone believing in G.D was deemed crazy. Naturally, there was no concept of mitzvos and the culture certainly prevented anyone from performing mitzvos. Torah scholars were sent to prison and so on. Consider how deeply impressed these impressions are when they are impressed on the young minds of children. When these people mature into adults in this environment it is very difficult to change the attitudes that were with them from childhood.

We can appreciate the greatness of character necessary for these people to slowly return to the heritage of their fathers. For them to begin recognizing that there is a G.D of Israel and that He gave us His Torah filled with mitzvos will require a major reorientation of everything they grew up with. How great an achievement it will be when they will develop a respect for Torah scholars even before they reach the level of mitzvah observance. Based on Rashi's explanation every step of this progression is a mitzvah; and certainly a fundamental

mitzvah whose achievement must be extraordinary.

It is understandable to compare the road home to Yiddishkeit as traveling to a destination, in which case you have not arrived until you get there. However, Rashi is teaching us that the road to HaShem has many stops along the way. Each stop is a destination of its own. In truth, we never reach our final destination because the goal is the relationship with HaShem and relationships can grow infinitely closer and closer. The analogy must therefore be to a journey of building a relationship where every rest stop is an accomplishment of its own; becoming closer than before; because HaShem is at every stop along the way.

I therefore wish to express my greatest admiration for the hundreds of Russian speaking families living in Baltimore who have embraced so much of Yiddishkeit. While there may be only 50 families who have fully adopted complete Torah observance there are hundreds more who recognize HaShem and His Torah and many other steps along that progression.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

HONEY

Last week we learned about sugar. This week, let's learn about another substance that is composed of different types of sugars, Honey.

Honey is a sweet, viscous food substance made by honey bees. Bees produce honey from the sugary secretions of plants called floral nectar. Honey gets its sweetness from the sugars fructose and glucose. It is a mixture of sugars and other carbohydrates, and is mainly fructose (about 38%) and glucose (about 32%), with smaller amounts of maltose, sucrose and water. Honey that comes from different floral sources will have visible differences in color and texture. One very unique quality about honey is that most microorganisms and bacteria do not grow in honey, so sealed honey does not spoil, even after thousands of years.

The technical term for the practice of collecting honey from hives of domesticated bees, is called apiculture. Honey production is an ancient activity. There are cave paintings in Spain that depict two honey foragers collecting honey and honeycomb from a wild bees' nest. The figures are depicted carrying baskets or gourds, and using a ladder or series of ropes to reach the nest. According to scientists these paintings are dated to be at least 5000 years old. In the area north of Turkey, where the Hittites & Medes once controlled, archaeologists found honey remains on the inner surface of clay vessels unearthed in an ancient tomb, dating back between 4,700 and 5,500 years.

How exactly do bees make honey? Honey is produced by bees collecting nectar for use as sugars to be stored as a long-term food supply. Two types of bees are involved in its production, Forager Bees and Processor Bees. The foraging bee leaves the hive and collects sugar-rich flower nectar, sucking it through its tongue and placing it in its special honey sack called a proventriculus. This is a separate section from its food stomach. The honey stomach holds about 40 mg of nectar, or roughly 50% of the bee's unloaded weight. Consider that even the most advanced design in aircraft can only take off with a load one-quarter of its own weight and you'll appreciate the miracle that the honeybee can remain airborne with such a load. How long does it take to fill the sac with nectar? It can require over a thousand flowers and more than an hour to fill.

The forager bees then return to the hive, where they empty their honey stomach and transfer nectar to the processor bees. The processor bees then use their honey stomachs to ingest and regurgitate the nectar. When it is ingested the bee's digestive enzymes hydrolyze and convert sucrose to a mixture of glucose and fructose, and break down other starches and proteins, increasing the acidity. In the process they also

form bubbles in the nectar which helps to evaporate the water out of the nectar. This lowers the water content from about 70 percent to 20 percent. The bees work together as a group and form an assembly line. They each regurgitate and digest, passing the nectar from one bee to the next, until the product reaches the honeycombs. It is then placed in honeycomb cells and left unsealed. It is unsealed because the nectar is still high in water content and has natural yeasts which need to be addressed to prevent the nectar from fermenting.

At this point the bees remove the remaining water. How do they do this? The bees flutter their wings constantly to circulate air and evaporate water from the honey to a water content of around 18%. This also raises the sugar concentration beyond the saturation point, thereby preventing fermentation.

There is another function of the wing fluttering. Bees generate large amounts of body heat, and the hive bees flutter their wings to constantly regulate the hive temperature, either heating with their bodies or cooling with water evaporation, to maintain a fairly constant temperature of about 95 °F in the honey-storage areas.

After the water is removed the bees then cover the honeycomb cells with wax to seal them.

Honey will not spoil even after thousands of years. Why is this so? The long shelf life of honey is attributed to an enzyme found in the stomach of bees. The bees mix glucose oxidase with expelled nectar they previously consumed, creating two byproducts – gluconic acid and hydrogen peroxide, which suppresses bacterial growth.

On average, one hive will produce about 65 lb of honey per year. It takes at least eight bees all their life to make one single teaspoonful.

To safely collect honey from a hive, beekeepers typically pacify the bees using a bee smoker. The smoke triggers a feeding instinct (an attempt to save the resources of the hive from a possible fire), making them less aggressive, and obscures the pheromones the bees use to communicate. The honeycomb is removed from the hive and the honey may be extracted from it.

One fascinating fact is that some bees don't collect nectar from flowers, but rather from another bug called an aphid. The honey produced from this is called myelate or Honeydew honey and is commonly produced in Germany's Black Forest. This type of honey has a much stronger flavor.

AS MUCH AS HE NEEDED THE MONEY, HE NEVER FORGOT WHAT HE WANTED IT FOR

Rabbi Hanoch Teller shared the following beautiful anecdote about Rav Nosson Zvi Finkel:

Before the global financial crisis, an entire world of Torah institutions and chesed organizations were funded by multi-tiered strata of the religious population.

But now the rug had been pulled out from under them. Not just the rug, but also the floor and the foundation. Only people of substantial means were left to support what had previously been shouldered by thousands of others. This meant that the truly affluent, those who had already been targeted by numerous charitable organizations, were now on the crosshairs of triple, conceivably octuple the number of causes. So, just like so many others, this Gvir, who was being actively pursued by the Mir Yeshiva, did not answer his phone nor reply to emails. No one was really surprised.

Therefore, personal agents who were friendly with him and associated with the Mir were dispatched to request an appointment. The Gvir was noncommittal to these requests, undoubtedly knowing full well that Reb Nosson Zvi would not be content with a check for \$3,600 or \$7,200 for that matter. They begged that he at least meet with the Rosh Yeshiva and even for this they could not secure his agreement. But he did not say no, he just did not say yes.

One Motzei Shabbos, to the utter surprise of all who were present, the Gvir himself walked into the home where the Rosh Yeshiva was staying.

Meanwhile, the Rosh Yeshiva also saw who had entered, was in the middle of talking to a bachur about his Torah studies. Everyone started gesticulating wildly to indicate LOOK WHO'S HERE! But Reb Nosson Zvi continued to hear out the bachur who was explaining his extraordinarily long and exceptionally protracted diyuk in Rashi. The bachur was taking what seemed to be an eternity, and meanwhile Mr. Elusive was in their clutches. Yet the Rosh Yeshiva continued to listen with patience and concentration while everyone else in the room was going insane.

Two of the yeshiva's activists in New York, who had high fived each other when the Gvir walked in, were now emitting involuntary gasps. Even the air seemed to be holding its breath while the boy droned on and on. One of the many admirable things about the Mirrer Yeshiva staff is that everyone recognizes that the Rosh Yeshiva is indeed, the Rosh Yeshiva. In the case of Reb Nosson Zvi, his brothers-in-law, and even those more senior and more learned than he, never, ever challenged his authority or leadership. And even in that exasperating moment it was no different. The Rosh Yeshiva, as much as he needed the money, never forgot what he wanted it for.

And that is; to expand Torah, to strengthen Torah and to teach Torah. First and foremost, he was an educator, and not only did he teach Torah, he taught Torah values and Torah priorities. And at that moment, there was nothing more important than a diyuk in Rashi.

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Rav Nosson Zvi
In High School



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's questions about the rats, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered as follows: If the previous owner were there for a few years and the neighbors did not protest, the neighbors may have lost their right to protest.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of our son

YAAKOV

May the zechus of bringing Shabbos-dik conversation to hundreds of Shabbos tables be a merit for Yaakov's growth in Torah and Yiras Shamayim
Rabbi Sruli and Esti Slansky

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