

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE PESACH APPEAL

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

As we approach Pesach, we know that there is a mitzvah of Kimcha Depischa, a mitzvah to support needy people to help them with their needs for Yom Tov. This leads us to the following story.

Yoel had a friend named Chaim who was having a difficult time with his parnasa, making ends meet. Chaim and his wife worked hard, but despite all their efforts their income was not sufficient to cover their needs.

He was feeling very down and confided in his friend Yoel. Yoel heard his story and it broke his heart. He felt a need to take action.

That night Yoel went to Mincha & Maariv and found the shul very full. He had an idea, he went to the Rav and asked permission to make an appeal for a needy member of the community. The Rav warmly agreed.

Immediately following Mincha, before Maariv, Yoel got up and told the gathered crowd about a person in their community who was having a difficult time covering the cost of their Pesach needs. Yoel of course did not mention the needy person's



OBEYING IS GREATER THAN VOLUNTEERING

The Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim siman 430 contains only one halacha "The Shabbos before Pesach is called Shabbos Hagadol because of the miracle that occurred." The miracle refers to the fact that on the tenth day of Nissan which was a Shabbos, our ancestors took sheep and brought them into their homes for the sake of sacrificing them five days later. The miracle was that in spite of the fact that the Egyptians worshipped the sheep none of the neighbors stopped us from collecting these sheep.

The commentaries struggle with the following question. Why is Shabbos associated with this event and not the calendar date of the 10th of Nissan? It would seem that Shabbos plays a role in this event. Before sharing the Sefas Emes' answer let us diverge for a moment.

Who is given more credit; the one who voluntarily gives \$1,000 to charity or one who is required by the elders of the town to give \$1,000 to charity? We would naturally give more credit to the former. And yet, our Sages teach that the mitzvah which one is commanded to perform has greater value than the mitzvah done voluntarily, without being commanded. Why should this be?

One approach to understanding this is based upon the recognition that there are two aspects to every mitzvah. The first aspect is the fulfillment of the given mitzvah. If HaShem commands us to eat Matzo at the Seder or to sit in the Succah then doing as we are commanded fulfills HaShem's expectation of us. If one ate the matzo and sat in the succah the mitzvah was performed.

There is, however, a second aspect which adds tremendous value to the mitzvah.

name. His appeal penetrated everyone's hearts and dozens of people came over with cash or checks to give to this needy person.

After Maariv, as Yoel was about to leave the shul, he was surprised to meet his friend Chaim. Chaim said to Yoel, "I heard your powerful appeal. This person sounds really desperate. I want to help as well. I want to give 100 dollars to help this person. Here is a check for 100 dollars. Things are tight for me as well, but at least I have a little. It sounds like the person you are collecting for has even less".

Yoel was very moved, and he gave Chaim a huge hug. He took Chaim aside, where no one could hear them.

"The truth is Chaim, I was collecting for you. All this money I collected is for you. You don't have to give anything for this campaign," Yoel said.

Chaim was extremely grateful to his friend for what he did. Then Chaim asked, "I wonder If I still have a responsibility to give this 100 dollars for someone else's needs for Pesach. When one makes a pledge to tzedakah it is like a vow. Am I obligated to give this 100 dollars to someone else?"

Yoel said, "I think we should ask a Rav but I would think that you don't have to give it. You made the vow to give to yourself, and now you have it."

"Yes," Chaim replied, "but I made a vow to give tzedakah, so maybe I have to give 100 dollars to tzedakah."

A similar question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? See Upiro Matok Bereishis 175

Regarding last week's question about using the photographer's backdrop without permission, Rav Zilberstein wrote as follows. While there are cases in halacha where one would have to pay for benefiting from another's work or property, even if they did not touch it, in this case, it was not permitted to use the equipment without permission, but after the fact, if they did use it to take a picture, they would not be liable to pay.

“3300 years ago, Hashem took the Jews out of Mitzrayim

Each year at the Seder, Hashem takes Mitzrayim out of the Jews”

Pictured:
Pharaoh Tutankhamun



There is an overarching mitzvah which covers everything we do in life. That mitzvah is to accept upon ourselves the Yoke of Heaven. Just as the subjects of the kingdom must accept upon themselves the authority of their king and commit their loyalty to him, so it is with every member of the Jewish people. We are all obligated to commit ourselves to accept HaShem's authority and be loyal to His every command. Hence, the second aspect of every mitzvah is our demonstration of accepting His Yoke.

Although a demonstration of loyalty done voluntarily is admirable, it does not come close to obeying an order that the King issued. Loyalty, by its very definition, is to obey the command of the authority and not to do as one feels like doing.

The word mitzvah derives from 'tzavah' which means to connect, as in connecting people together. In modern Hebrew it is used to define the staff of a company, a 'tzeves' a group of people connected together. The reason why mitzvah derives from 'tzavah' is because a mitzvah connects us with our Creator. By

accepting upon ourselves His Yoke and obeying His commands, we connect with Him as the subjects connect with their king.

Therefore, Chazal teach גדול המצוה ועושה ממי שאינו מצוה ועושה, Greater is the one performing a mitzvah that he is obligated to perform than one who performs a mitzvah voluntarily.

The mitzvah of taking the sheep and bringing it into our homes was the very first mitzvah that our ancestors were commanded to do. This was their first opportunity to achieve that "Greatness" that גדלות of obeying.

Shabbos is the special day of the week which is designated for HaShem's people to connect with Him. Until that Shabbos our connection with HaShem was limited to the voluntary acts we chose to perform. Now, with this mitzvah to take the sheep we were able to demonstrate our loyalty to HaShem on a whole new level. This is why the miracle is associated with Shabbos. It made that Shabbos, the Great Shabbos.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos HaGadol!

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE DOGS OF EGYPT

When the Jews left Mitzrayim, after Makas Bechoros, the Torah writes "and to all the children of Israel, no dog sharpened his tongue, from man to animal". (Shemos 11,7) Rashi quotes our Sages that this means that dogs didn't even begin to bark at the Jewish people.

Why is this significant? Some commentaries (Rav Sa'adia Gaon) explain that this means, after the final plague, no harm occurred to the Jews, not even the smallest damage of a dog barking at them to a larger harm, or injury by an animal or a person.

Others explain (Ravam, cited by the Sharei Aron) that this is referring to dogs that the Jewish people owned as guard dogs. The verse is saying that during the plague of the death of the first born, the dogs among the Jewish people did not bark, and nothing or no one passed by the dogs to harm the Jewish people.

Another explanation (Or Hachaim) is that this was a message to the Egyptians, The dogs would not bark at the Jewish people; but if Egyptians would attempt to hide among the Jewish people, dogs would bark at them to single them out.

Finally the Midrash (Shmos Raba 20,17) cites another explanation. When Yosef died, the Egyptians buried his body in a tomb. They wanted to make sure that no one would remove the coffin. To protect his tomb they constructed dogs made out of gold. These golden mechanical dogs were then given the ability to bark extremely loud. If anyone would disturb the tomb of Yosef, the golden dogs would bark so loud that their cry could be heard at a distance of a 40 day journey. However Moshe made sure not to leave Egypt without the coffin of Yosef. While everyone was asking for gold from the Egyptians in preparation for their departure, Moshe went to Yosef's tomb. When Moshe came, the golden dogs guarding Yosef's tomb did not alert anyone with their infamous loud barks.

From all of the above commentaries we get the following impressions about dogs in Egypt. Dogs were domesticated and common in Egypt. Dogs were kept as pets. Dogs were used as guards and to police. The Egyptians made dogs out of gold to guard tombs. The truth is that archaeologists have uncovered all of these ideas about dogs in Egypt.

To begin, dogs were very popular in Egypt, and dogs were a common feature of the ancient Egyptian landscape. Pictures of dogs can be found in many of the ancient artifacts uncovered from the Ancient Egyptians. **(Pictured top left)**

What kinds of dogs did the ancient Egyptians have? They were breeds that are familiar to us today. They included Basenji, Greyhound, Saluki, Pharaoh hound, and mastiffs. **(Top right and bottom left)**

The ancient Egyptians were among the earliest people to recognize the value of the dog and show their appreciation for its particular skills and talents. According to archeologists, dogs were used in the following ways

in ancient Egypt.

1. As companions and as household pets. An early tomb painting dated to at least 2500 BCE shows a man walking his dog on a leash in a scene recognizable to anyone in the modern day. Dogs have been depicted wearing a wide collar fastened with a bow at the back of the neck. Sometimes dog collars were made out of gold and silver inscribed with the dog's name. Some of the names found on collars were names like Brave One, Reliable, Good, Herdsman, North-Wind, Antelope and even "Useless". Other names came from the dog's color, such as "Blacky."
2. They served as hunters to help catch smaller animals.
3. They were used by shepherds to help herd cattle, and to guard the cattle. This idea helps to illustrate why the Jews would have dogs as well.
4. They were used as guard dogs. They also used figures of dogs to guard tombs, as the Midrash says about Yosef. In the tomb of King Tut, (King Tutankhamun) archaeologists found a black and gold dog. This dog, preserved in great condition, can still be seen in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. **(Bottom right)**
5. They were used by Egyptian police as police dogs to catch criminals.
6. They were used by the Egyptian military in military actions, as war dogs and attack dogs. These ideas help to illustrate what our Sages mean that no dog even barked at them. The Egyptians used vicious guard and attack dogs, but none of them hurt the Jewish people as they left.
7. All of the above ideas may seem similar to dogs in modern times. However, the Egyptians did one more thing. Dogs were often killed as sacrifices to their gods, Archaeologists have found graves with millions of dogs that were killed as sacrifices to Egyptian gods. **(Bottom third from right).**

Archaeologists also write about pariah dogs, wild dogs and strays of mixed breeds, who often hunted around the outskirts of a village or necropolis (cemetery) **(Bottom, second to right)**. These dogs often traveled in packs and scavenged for food. Some archaeologists suggest that the presence of these wild pariah dogs encouraged the Egyptian practice of burial in tombs to protect the remains from them. In the early years of the Egyptian empire, the dead were buried in simple earthen graves, often, quite shallow which allowed for the pariah dogs to easily dig down and disturb them.

Interestingly, this idea is reflected in the Midrash Lekach Tov (Bo 9-11) who writes that during the plague of the firstborn, wild dogs dug up first born Egyptians who were already buried in their graves. Wild dogs also attacked Egyptians who were trying to hide their firstborn children.

THE PRE PESACH TRIAL

Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz, the author of Shelah, was the Rabbi of Frankfurt. Years later, when his grandson vacated the position as Rav, he indicated that his place should be filled only by someone who could resolve three difficult Talmudic problems which his grandfather the Shelah had left unanswered. The community appointed three of its leading Torah scholars as a search committee, to find someone who could meet these qualifications. The three traveled from city to city, but in their discussions with many Torah scholars, they did not find anyone who could resolve the three unanswered questions.

Upon arrival in Cracow, they were invited to participate in a celebration at which several people gave Torah discourses. One of these was a youngster, who, to their surprise, satisfactorily answered the three questions. Upon remarking on this young man's exceptional erudition, they were told that he was the student of a Talmud instructor, a humble man who was highly thought of in the community, but who was extremely modest and did not assume any position other than that of a tutor. The three met with the teacher, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel, and told him of their mission, and that they believed he was the proper person to assume the rabbinate of Frankfurt. The teacher told them this was absurd, and that he had no intention of doing anything other than continuing his function as a teacher.

The following day Rabbi Yosef Shmuel took ill, and his condition deteriorated rapidly, to the point where the chevra kadisha (the burial society) was summoned, since it appeared that his end was imminent. At one point he sat up and said, "Master of the Universe! If it is your will that I assume the rabbinate of Frankfurt, I will do so." He then recovered rapidly. This great Torah scholar had preferred to remain in the shadows, and only when he felt his illness was a message that he was remiss in fulfilling the Divine mission, did he consent to allow his spiritual achievements to become known.

This story does not end here. Upon arrival in Frankfurt, he found the Jewish community to be in the throes of depression. It was before Pesach, and there was a blood libel against the Jews. A gentile child had been found murdered, and the local priest, a virulent anti-Semite, had indicted the Jewish community in the crime, citing the false allegation that the Jews needed blood for matzos. The priest gave the Jewish community three days in which to surrender the murderer, otherwise every Jew would be banished from the city with nothing but the clothes on his back, and could be considered lucky if his life was spared.

Rabbi Yosef Shmuel sought to calm the community's anxiety, and said that he would clarify the matter to everyone's satisfaction.

On the third day, the case came before the local tribunal, and after the priest delivered his scathing indictment and demanded that the killer be surrendered, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel stated that they did not know who the killer was. However, he was willing to submit to a trial by ordeal, which was generally accepted. He requested that the body of the child be brought, and that everyone in the community pass by and grasp the hand of the dead child. "I am certain that the killer will not be able to release his grasp." When all the Jews successfully passed the ordeal, Rabbi Yosef Shmuel said, "The killer is not among the Jews. Let the others here pass the ordeal."

When it was the priest's turn to approach the body, he turned pale and began trembling. When he took the child's hand, he was unable to release his grasp and began screaming, "Let me go! Let me go!" He then admitted that he had killed the child to incite the community to an uprising against the Jews.

(From Not Just Stories By Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twersky)



OUR APPRECIATION

I wish to express my gratitude to Rabbi Reuven and Janine Chapman for sponsoring the printing of last week's TableTalk
With much syata d'Shmaya Achim/TableTalk was successful in reaching our fundraising goal.
I wish to express my gratitude to all of the hundreds of supporters who helped make this a reality.
I thank you.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt'l for all he has done for the members of the Achim community and for the entire Jewish people.

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