

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE PROFANE PARROT

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha states "You shall not profane your words" (Bamidbar 30,3). Simply, this is referring to the prohibition of profaning your words by not keeping a vow. This can also be an allusion to the Torah prohibition of *nibul pe*, using and listening to vulgar language. The Sefer Charedim (Sefer Chareidim 24-49) says that the Torah says "Lo ireh becha ervas davar". (Devarim 23,15) Our Sages say that this can be read "Hashem should not see in our camp immorality of speech."

This leads us to the following fascinating true story. Zev had a teenage son Eli who had some emotional difficulties. Their family doctor recommended that Zev buy his son a pet. If Eli would take care of the pet it would help him to develop his social skills. Eli was very excited about the idea. He asked his father if they could buy a talking parrot. Zev agreed and together they traveled to Tel Aviv to an expensive pet store to purchase a parrot.

Zev walked into the store and greeted the store owner. "Hi there. We are looking to buy a trained, talking parrot. Our doctor recommended we get a pet for my son. Do you have one?"

The proprietor smiled and said, "as a matter of fact we do. This parrot here has been trained to talk. It had a previous owner and it knows many interest-



RUNNING ERRANDS

This week's second Parsha, Maasei, recounts the travels of our people's 40 year trek through the desert. The opening verse reads "These are the travels of the Children of Israel" Our 42 encampments are all enumerated with their specific names. The Torah therefore reads "And they traveled from Dafka and they encamped in Alush and they traveled from Alush and they encamped in Refidim, and they traveled from Refidim and they encamped...". When one travels to a destination or to multiple destinations the traveling itself is secondary to the arrival and encampment. Traveling is only a means to arrive at a destination. Why then does the Torah discuss the travels and not the destinations?

In answering this question the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh quotes from the Zohar and other sources that explain the function of our travels through the desert was for the purpose of retrieving the sparks of Kedusha that were trapped by the Satan whose territory is the desert. When Adam and Chava ate from the Tree, sparks of Kedusha that filled the world were captured by the Satan and were held captive in his desert. As we traveled through the desert and encamped in the places where those points of Kedusha were being held hostage, those points separated themselves from their captors and attached themselves to our people who were carrying the Presence of HaShem. When it came time for us to travel on to the next location those newly attached points joined us and freed themselves from their captivity.

Let us create a model that may help us appreciate this notion. Imagine an explosion occurs and a very expensive stone blows up and fragments into millions of tiny pieces. Each piece becomes covered with a film of dirt and those small pieces are no longer discernible as being fragments of that stone. They all look like dirt; that is all you can

ing phrases. He says the funniest things. Guests love this bird and he is a constant stream of entertainment." In front of them, the owner prompted the parrot to speak, and indeed it said some very cute and humorous phrases.

Eli's face lit up when he heard the parrot. It was perfect. The owner asked for a price of 5000 shekels, and Zev gladly agreed.

The two took the parrot home. Zev gathered the family together and showed his wife and all his children the new bird.

But then to Zev's utter shock, the parrot used a vulgar phrase. Then again the parrot used a profane phrase with language that is forbidden for a Jew to use. Zev and his wife were shocked and embarrassed. They did not want their children to listen to such words.

Zev grabbed the cage and immediately drove back to the pet store.

"You never told me that the parrot uses vulgar language", Zev told the store owner. "Can I please have a refund?"

"Wait a minute," the owner said. "We only give refunds if there is a severe defect in what we sold. Is anything wrong with this parrot? Does it not talk?"

"It talks, but we are a religious family and I can't have the parrot using vulgar language in my home, Zev replied."

"Ahh, interesting", the owner said. "So far the feedback I have heard about the parrot is that people thought its manner of speaking was really funny. Well since it knows how to talk, why don't you just train it to use some new Jewish phrases?"

"I can do that", Zev said. But in the meantime, it will be using crude language and I can't let the parrot into my home.

The owner said, "Listen, I think there is no apparent defect with the parrot as it talks perfectly well. Also you never made any stipulations regarding the language the parrot uses. But I'm sympathetic. If you ask your Rav if I have an obligation to return the money to you, I will follow his advice.

Zev brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. Did the owner have to take back the parrot and refund the 5000 shekels? On one hand, there was nothing physically wrong with the parrot. But on the other hand, a parrot that uses foul language is certainly a defect for a Jewish home.

What do you think? According to the Torah does the store owner have a legal obligation to refund the money?

See Upiryo Matok Bamidbar Page 371



Shver iz nor dem ershten mol

It's only hard the first time.



Yiddish Saying

see. However, this stone has a remarkable nature. Larger pieces of this stone apply a gravitational force on smaller pieces which draws them towards the larger stone.

As the larger stone passes nearby, the smaller fragments emerge from their film of dirt and attach themselves to the larger stone and as you pass this larger stone through all the places where those fragments landed you will eventually gather all the fragments.

In a similar vein, HaShem's world was filled with Kedusha. It was filled with His Light. Once Adam and Chava ate from the Tree, a darkness descended upon the world. The Light of HaShem's Kedusha was shattered and many points of that Kedusha were covered with tumah. Each point of Kedusha yearns to return to its Source, to the Ribono shel Olom but it is captured and covered with filth. Throughout the desert all these points were captured. In some places there were many and in other places there were less.

When HaShem gave us His Torah and rested His Presence among us we were carrying the Source of His Kedusha. As we encamped at those 42 locations, the captured points of Light shook themselves loose from the film of filth in which they were captured and as we moved on, these points joined our journey. With this understanding the Ohr Hachaim explains why in some locations we encamped 24 hours and in other locations we encamped a year. Depending on how many points there were and how difficult they were captured determined the duration of time we needed to spend there.

The reason the Torah highlights the travels and not the encampments is because the purpose of our journey was to bring all the points of Kedusha into the Land of Israel. The encampments were only the place to pick them up. When, on your way home from work you stop off at the dry cleaners, the grocery store, the shoemaker and the bakery, you will not consider those stops primary to your trip home. They are only ancillary. Your primary activity is to get home. You are only stopping off to pick up what you need at home.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

PARROTS

You might have noticed that for the past few months we have been exploring different aspects of fruits and vegetables. This week, in light of the fact that we shared a mitzvah dilemma about a parrot, let's shift gears a bit and learn some of the fascinating details about parrots.

Parrots have been very popular as pets since ancient times because of their vivid colors and ability to speak. The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, who lived during the time of Rav Yochanan ben Zakai and Vespasian, wrote about parrots kept as pets in Europe. There are roughly 398 species of parrots, most of which are found in tropical and subtropical regions. Birds in the Parrot family include conures, macaws, amazon parrots, cockatoos, greys, lovebirds, cockatiels, budgerigars, caiques, parakeets, eclectus, pionus, and poicephalus.

The greatest diversity of parrots can be found in South America and Australia. Parrots can range in size from the buff-faced pygmy parrot at 3.1 inches in length to the relatively huge hyacinth macaw, at 3.3 ft in length. Some large parrot species, including large cockatoos, amazons, and macaws, have very long lifespans, with 80 - 100 years being reported. Small parrots, such as lovebirds, hanging parrots, and budgies, have shorter lifespans up to 15-20 years.

Rather than make their own nests, most parrots live in tree hollows. Some species live in large parrot colonies. The burrowing parrot nests in colonies up to 70,000 strong.

Parrots are among the world's most intelligent birds. The brain-to-body size ratio of parrots is comparable to that of the more intelligent monkeys. Not only have parrots demonstrated intelligence through scientific testing of their language-using ability, but also some species of parrots are highly skilled at using tools and solving puzzles. Talking parrots score very high on tests designed to measure problem-solving ability.

Most parrot species are capable of using their feet to manipulate food and other objects with a high degree of dexterity, in a similar manner to a human using their hands.

Because of their intelligence, they are difficult to study in the wild. Parrots are difficult to catch and once caught, they are difficult to mark. This is because most wild bird studies rely on banding or wing tagging, but parrots usually chew off such these tags.

The most important components of most parrots diets are seeds, nuts, fruit, buds, and other plant material. However, a few parrot species sometimes eat animals and carrion. For example, Golden-winged parakeets prey on water snails and the New Zealand kea can hunt adult sheep.

We know that many parrots can imitate human speech or other sounds. Some grey parrots have even shown an ability to associate words with their meanings and form simple sentences. Parrots do not have vocal cords, so the sound is accomplished by expelling air across the mouth of the trachea in the organ called the syrinx. Different sounds

are produced by changing the depth and shape of the trachea. There are of course limitations on the sounds that birds can mimic because they lack lips.

The English verb to parrot someone, (as in, the children were obviously just parroting what they'd been told) connotes the idea that parrots don't really understand what they are saying, but they are just mimicking the sounds. But there is actually a debate within the scientific community whether talking parrots also have some cognitive understanding of the language.

There is a strong indication that parrots actually understand the words. For example, Alex, a grey parrot, showed scientist Irene Pepperberg that he understood categorizations like "same and different" and "bigger and smaller". For example, he could say that two objects were the same or two were different. He could identify objects by their shape. For example, he would call the shape a "Three-corner", "Four-corner", up to "Six-corner". He could identify material. When shown a pom-pom or a wooden block, he could answer "Wool" or "Wood" correctly, approximately 80% of the time. Alex could identify the difference between yellow and green same-sized objects by saying "Color" or identify a larger one by naming its color. If asked what the difference was between two identical blue keys, Alex learned to reply, "None."

A parakeet named Disco was a YouTube sensation. One of his most famous phrases was the impressively long: "What seems to be the problem officer? I am not a Crook, my name is Disco, I'm a Parakeet."

Interestingly, if a domesticated parrot is introduced to wild birds, the wild birds may also mimic the new sounds. This phenomenon has been observed in public parks in Sydney, Australia, where wild parrots utter phrases such as "Hello darling!" and "What's happening?"

Why do parrots imitate people? This is still an open question but several theories have been proposed. Here are three suggestions.

Flock recognition. In the wild, flocks of parrots develop distinct local dialects. Birds respond more to vocalizations that are familiar to their own, and they ostracize individuals that vocalize in a different way. Parrots raised among humans might mimic humans, particularly their owners, to gain acceptance as a member of the family (flock). If they hear a word or phrase repeatedly, they might interpret that as a vocalization distinct to their flock. They then attempt to vocalize themselves to maintain their membership of that flock. They speak like humans to show their identification with that "flock".

Another suggestion is that having a large vocabulary makes it more attractive to prospective mates. The male lyrebird, for example, adorns his song with many different mimicked sounds, often the songs of other nearby birds, but can include car horns, chainsaws, and barking dogs.

A third suggestion is that this is an Anti-predation technique. A parrot mimicking a human's voice may scare away predators.

LOOKING FOR RUBBER BANDS

Rav Avigdor Miller sometimes asked people to look on the street for rubber bands that the mailmen discarded, claiming he needed them to pack his tapes. This was an unusual request, but his loyal students complied. One person was particularly scrupulous in keeping his eyes glued to the sidewalk and managed to amass a large quantity of rubber bands. When he brought them to Rabbi Miller the Rav told him to keep them because they were holy — they protected his kedushah. The man then realized that the reason Rav Miller asked for the rubber bands was to help his students avoid looking at improper things while they walk.

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One day, a talmid chacham who served as a maggid shiur in a yeshivah came to Rabbi Miller. He told him that he had tremendous gratitude to Rabbi Miller and felt that he needed to meet him and tell him his story in person. He related as follows:

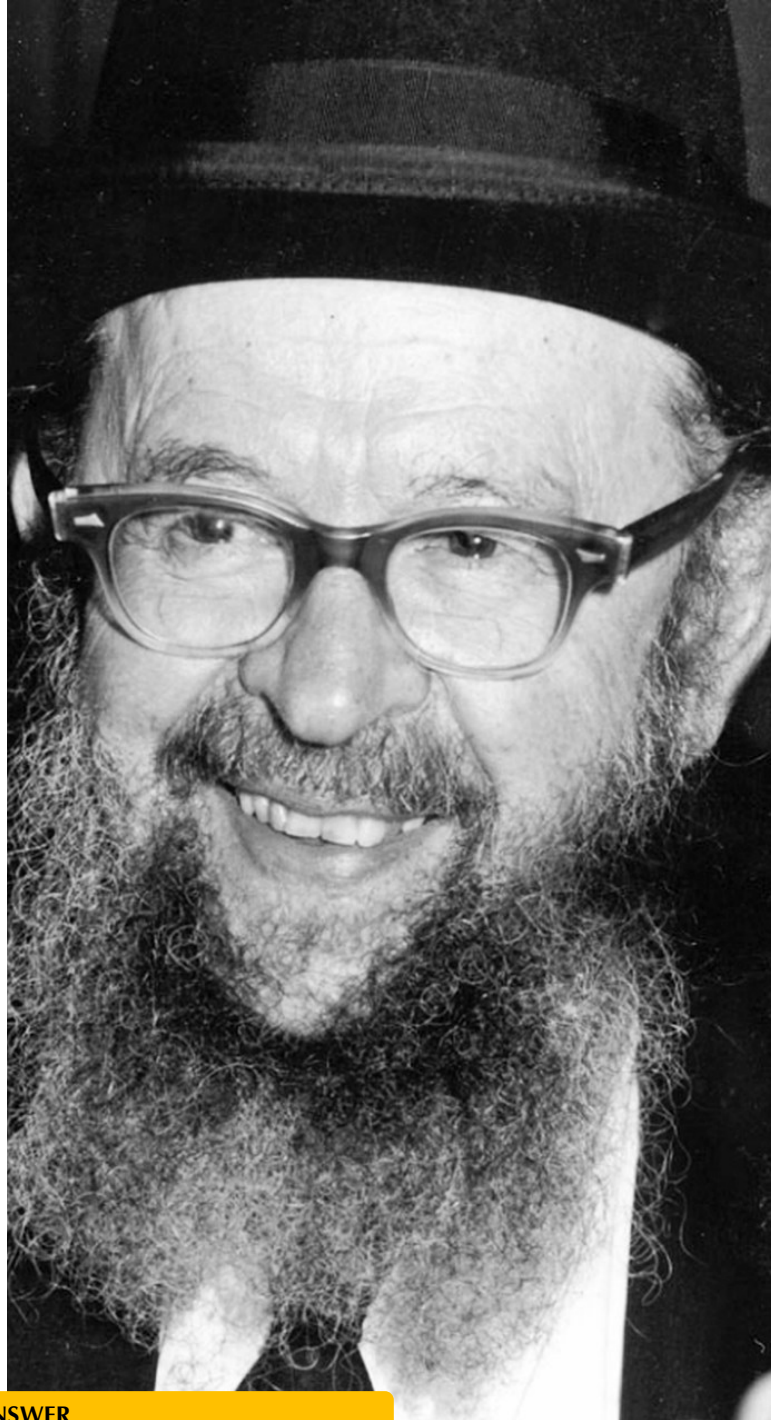
When I was a bachur in yeshiva, I was definitely not among the best students there. I used to listen to non-Jewish rock and roll music in my dorm room. I was nervous, though, that the Mashgiach would find out, so I came up with a plan. I found tapes of Rabbi Miller's shiurim and placed them on my night table next to my tape player. When I heard the Mashgiach coming in, I quickly replaced whatever tape I was listening to with a shiur from Rabbi Miller.

Because of this, I came to listen to the shiurim of Rabbi Miller every day, even for only a couple of minutes. Each time I listened, I heard insights, new ideas, and they started to make an impact on me.

Eventually, I abandoned my rock music tapes and switched to Rabbi Miller tapes. In time, I became a different person and I am currently a maggid shiur in a yeshivah. This is all because of Rabbi Miller's tapes which I used to hide my music tapes.

When Rabbi Miller heard this story he particularly enjoyed it.

(From Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and Revolution, By Yaakov Y. Hamburger, Published By Judaica Press, Preprinted With Permission From The Copyright Holders)



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the sleeping passenger, Rav Zilberstein answered as follows. The passenger has a weakness to his argument because he should not have slept for such a short trip. But the driver has a weakness in his position because he should have clarified if the passenger meant Petach Tikva street or Petach Tikva city. Because of this, they should compromise and split the fare from Yerushalayim to Petach Tikva and the passenger should pay half. With regard to the return trip, this is like a new fare and if the passenger wants he can take a bus home or pay the full fare back home in the taxi. See Upiryo Matok Bereishis 132

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

As an appreciation to the entire community for providing us an environment in which Eliyahu was able to gain a love for Torah and mitzvos.

May HaShem bless Eliyahu to bring nachas to his parents, to the community and to all of Klal Yisroel
Eugene and Miram Vurgafman

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