

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE WIRE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion talks about the importance of keeping the Mishpatim. The Mishpatim are the mitzvos that deal with avoiding injustice towards another person. This leads us to the following story told by Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein.

Eliezer was an experienced electrician. He was called to work on an important electrical issue at a hospice. The hospice had many people who were dying and were being supported by respirators and other medical equipment.

Eliezer began his work near the main power box of the facility. He took all the necessary precautions and turned off the power on the specific lines that he needed to fix. Eliezer took out his pliers to cut a wire. But suddenly he felt a very strong electrical shock in his arm. It was clear that one of the wires was mislabeled.



MEN ARE FROM MARS AND WOMEN FROM VENUS AND HASHEM CREATED THE UNIVERSE

In the opening verse of this week's Parsha, B'chukosai, the Torah establishes the bottom line of Judaism. The Torah states, the only way for us to ensure our welfare, our prosperity and our security is to be committed to our two responsibilities. Our first responsibility is to walk in HaShem's chukim (laws). Our second responsibility is to perform His mitzvos. The Torah warns us that when we become lackadaisical in these responsibilities then the fiber of our nation will unravel.

Our Sages teach that the first responsibility refers to our duty to toil in the study of HaShem's Torah and the second is the actual performance of His mitzvos. Why is so much primacy given to Torah study. From the order listed in the Parsha it is evident that the toiling in Torah study carries greater significance than the performance of the mitzvos!

Furthermore, how does "walking in HaShem's chukim" imply our obligation to study Torah? Additionally, why the choice of chukim and not all mitzvos?

Chukim are those mitzvos that the human mind does not fully grasp. Let us take for example the laws of tumah. Why should I be rendered impure if I attend the funeral of a great Rabbi? Why, if I did attend the funeral, will a few drops of water mixed with ashes from a red cow purify me? Chukim are very similar to the laws of nature. Why should a larger mass attract a smaller mass to create gravity? Nobody knows why, we only know that it does. We accept that law and live our lives based on that law.

An intense electrical current can induce involuntary muscle contractions. This can prevent the victim from breaking free of the source of electricity. That is what happened to Eliezer. The hand that was shocked was contracted and he was unable to pull it away.

Eliezer knew he was in great danger. He used his other arm to reach for the power main, the main switch that would turn off all the power in the facility. Turning off the power would save his life.

But in a nanosecond the following thought flashed through his mind. Was he allowed to turn off the power? If he did so, he would turn off all the respirators in the building. He wasn't sure, but that had a significant chance of ending the life of many people.

According to the Torah, what do you think Eliezer was allowed to do?

The Torah says that if we are told to murder an innocent person to save our own life, we should rather die than commit the murder.

In this case, can Eliezer turn off the power main to save his life? On one hand he might be murdering someone to save his life. But on the other hand, turning off the power main was not a direct act of killing. It was indirect. It was also not certain that he would kill others, but very likely. Also would the Torah require him to just sit there and be passive?

What do you think the Torah would say?

See Hebrew Veharev Na Volume Three page 336

If you have a true mitzvah dilemma that you would like us to share, please email it to rabiweiner@gmail.com



At a most basic level, the single expectation HaShem has from His people as a nation and from every individual Jew is that they should develop their relationship with Him. The performance of His mitzvos is simply the vehicle by which we achieve that. This is why we have basic mitzvos that should be performed constantly. These include loving HaShem, fearing HaShem, anticipating HaShem's support and so on. These mitzvos are basic expressions common to all relationships. The point of everything is to draw ourselves close to Him so that He will draw Himself close to us.

Let us consider the parallel of the husband-wife relationship. Every man knows that the laws governing relationships from his perspective differ greatly than those from her perspective. Nevertheless, the only way he can grow closer to her is by acknowledging her perspective.

With HaShem, this is even more profound. His perspective of reality is actual reality; He is the Creator of reality. The only way for us to walk towards HaShem is by toiling in His chukim. We must break our heads to understand and appreciate His reality. Although we do not understand why they should be what they are, we must nevertheless, toil and involve ourselves in His reality. The more we do so, the greater our connection to Him will be and the greater will be our welfare, our prosperity and our security.

Relationships are all about bringing yourself closer to your friend. Perhaps this is why "walking in HaShem's chukim" describe the process of developing our relationship with Him by means of studying His Torah and understanding His reality.

There is currently a serious concern over the rise of anti-Semitism and for good reason. Before launching us into exile it is inconceivable to think HaShem would not give us the solution to our single largest problem. The solution lies in our Parsha. All we need to do is heed her advice.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

HE GIVES FOOD TO THE CHILDREN OF THE RAVENS THAT CALL OUT TO HIM

Baltimore, of course, has a strong connection to Ravens. Ravens are also a bird that are seen as somewhat special in the Torah.

When the great Flood subsided, Noach first sent the raven to see if the water went down. Why the raven? Our Sages teach that Noach knew that the raven was among the most intelligent birds and would succeed in this mission.

Noach also knew that the raven has special protection and ability to find food because it knows to pray to HaShem. This we see as it says in our daily prayers, "He gives food to all flesh, to the children of the raven that call out to HaShem". (Tehillim 147,9) Noach also knew that the raven eats carrion so if the water subsided low enough, it would reveal dead carcasses and the raven would bring back meat.

But the raven returned empty handed. Why? Our Sages teach that the raven was jealous to leave its mate alone with Noach. The raven is one of the few birds that mate for life. In addition, ravens also could not risk this dangerous mission. There was only one male raven in existence and ravens would be sent as messengers by HaShem to support Eliyahu and a hundred prophets later on in the time of Achav. Because of the special status of the raven, in Shir Hashirim (Chap 5) the Divine Presence is described as having curls as black as a raven. (See Sharei Aron page 51 for the source of all of the above) We see that the Torah paints a picture of the raven as a bird that has a special blessing from HaShem, is very intelligent, is monogamous for life, and has a unique ability to find food.

Let's explore all of this. Ravens have coexisted with humans for thousands of years. In contrast to other birds who are endangered, ravens are seen as a very "successful" species. In some areas they have been so numerous that people have regarded them as pests. Part of their success as a species is because they are extremely versatile and opportunistic in finding sources of nutrition, feeding on carrion, insects, cereal grains, berries, fruit, small animals, nesting birds, and food waste.

A mature raven can grow to be as much as 2 feet long, and can have a wingspan of more than 4 feet wide. Ravens can live for a long time. Ravens kept at the Tower of London have lived for more than 40 years.

Once paired, ravens tend to nest together for life, usually in the same location. Ravens usually travel in mated pairs. Outside a family unit however, relationships between ravens are often quarrelsome.

The brain of the raven is among the largest of any bird species and as a result the raven is unusually intelligent. Ravens display unique ability in problem-solving, as well as other cognitive processes such as imitation and insight. One experiment designed to evaluate the problem-solving ability of the ra-

ven involved a "puzzle" with a piece of meat attached to a string hanging from a perch. To reach the food, the raven needed to stand on the perch, pull the string up a little at a time, and step on the loops to gradually shorten the string. Only ravens succeeded in this. This demonstrates an ability to solve problems which is unusual among animals. Because of their intelligence, ravens can mimic sounds from their environment, including human speech. If a member of a pair is lost, its mate reproduces the calls of its lost partner to encourage its return.

Ravens, are often successful in defending their young from predators, due to their cunning. They have been observed dropping stones on potential predators that venture close to their nests.

Ravens engage in games with other species, such as playing catch-me-if-you-can with wolves, otters and dogs. They are also one of only a few wild animals who make their own toys. They have been observed breaking off twigs to play with socially.

Ravens use this great intelligence that was as given to them to find food in clever ways. Sometimes they associate with the grey wolf in the winter following it around to scavenge wolf-kills. Sometimes when a raven finds a dead animal too large to eat, it calls wolves to the site of dead animal. The wolves then open the carcass. This leaves the scraps which are more accessible, to the raven.

Ravens are regular predators at bird nests. They brazenly pick off eggs and chicks when they spot an opportunity. Because of this they are considered the primary natural threat to the critically endangered California condor, a bird that is more than five times larger than the raven, because they readily steal its eggs.

Ravens exhibit a unique behavior called recruitment. This is where a ravens call other ravens to a food bonanza, usually a carcass, with a series of loud yells.

Ravens also proactively plant seeds to ensure their survival. In the wild, the raven chooses the best habitat and then disperses seeds in locations best suited for its survival.

Ravens often watch where other ravens bury their food so they can steal from them. To counter this, ravens have been observed pretending to make a cache without actually depositing the food, in order to confuse onlookers!

Thank you HaShem for showing us Your wisdom!

HOW CAN WE HANDLE THE NEWS?

Rav Baruch Ber Liebowitz was known for having an acute sense of empathy and responsibility for fellow Jews.

The gaon R' Shalom Rosenblit related that he came to the Yeshivah of Rav Baruch Ber Liebowitz during a time when Jewish blood was being spilled in Eretz Yisrael. He was told not to let Rav Baruch Ber know, for he was likely to become ill if he heard that Jews were being killed.

However once Rav Baruch Ber heard of what was going on, he asked that someone bring him a religious newspaper so he could learn more about the situation.

One of his talmidim asked him, "But the Rebbi does not usually read newspapers, even the religious ones."

Reb Boruch Ber answered, "That is so when times are normal, but now, during such terror-filled times, how can one remain uninformed about what is happening? One has to sympathize and feel the pain of the Klal!" In fact, as he read the paper, he literally writhed in pain. He sighed in anguish over the Jewish community's plight until his suffering became a serious threat to his health. His family tried their best to convince him not to dwell so much on the matter, but Rav Baruch Ber did not listen to them.

One day, however, Rav Baruch Ber asked that they stop bringing him the newspaper. He said that he could not possibly bear any more pain. He added, "I don't understand how people can read newspapers. True, if a person is not stirred to feel the suffering of the Klal, he is being apathetic and cruel. On the other hand, if he is stirred to feel for the Klal, how can he bear so much pain?"

(From Reb Baruch Ber by Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Rosenthal)



THE ANSWER

Regarding the question of whether maaser given when a person was still a non Jew can be counted as maaser when he converts, Rav Zilberstein answers as follows: If the tzedakah was given when he had the intention of converting, then it counts toward his maaser. We don't say that he is like a "new person" regarding the mitzva. This is similar to the halacha that if a convert already has two children before he converted, he has still fulfilled the mitzva of Pru Urevu. However if he did not intend to convert at the time he gave the tzedakah, it is unclear if it would be counted as maaser. See Chashukei Chemed Bava Basra page 79.

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