1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah
A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

PARSHAS KI SAVO – AVODAH ZARA REVISITED

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

Throughout Sefer Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu warns Bnai Yisrael not to stray after avodah zara. And he had good reason to be concerned as throughout their history until the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash, Bnai Yisrael were deeply immersed in idol worship. Even after the dramatic stand of Eliyahu Hanavi against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, they went back to idol worship. Their kings and "prophets" not only worshipped the idols, they also encouraged all the people to follow suit. From Yerovam of the Northern Kingdom to Menashe of the Judean Kingdom, with few exceptions, all the Jewish Kings were passionately pursuing avodah zara.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 64a) explains that there was a special yetzer hara to worship idolatry and that the Sanhedrin prayed to Hashem to eliminate it. Thus today we have no inkling of such a desire. However the Chazon Ish points out that their pursuit of idolatry derived from a deep belief in the spiritual and mystical. When a person did not completely believe in Hashem's absolute control over every aspect of Creation, he would then look to other spiritual beliefs to understand events and resolve his problems. This was much more than an ideology; it was a deep passion embedded in their psyche. Therefore they were very hard pressed to give it up. Even when the righteous King Yoshiyahu banned all avodah zara and sent inspectors to every home, the people hid their idols rather than relinquish them (Eicha Rabba 1:18). Many years later, the wicked king Menashe came to Rav Ashi in a dream and told him that had he been alive in that era, he would have raised his coattails in order to run to worship idols (Sanhedrin 102b).

The Chazon Ish asserts that to a great extent we have replaced idolatry with science and intellectualism. We seek the reasons for events and various phenomena and the resolution of the problems that they cause in the sciences, whether they be biology, meteorology, astronomy, et al. To some extent we have replaced the spiritual avodah zara with a physical one because we too have difficulty believing in things that we cannot see even with the aid of a microscope or telescope.

One who truly believes that Hashem's will is the ultimate cause of everything, believes that Hashem causes it to rain, or ploni to become ill or the volcano to erupt. Although Hashem generally follows "the laws of nature," in reality nature is no more than a set of axiomatic laws that Hashem created and controls. Therefore, even though we eat to sustain our health, we first make a bracha to acknowledge that He provided the food. And after we attend to our hygienic needs, we say asher yatzar to thank Hashem for the phenomenal workings of our bodies. And when we take medicine we say, "Yehi ratzon… May it be Your will that this action will help to heal me."

We certainly acknowledge the great advances of modern science and medicine, but when we leave Hashem out of the picture we demonstrate a lack of Emunah that He is the "sibas kol hasibos – the cause of all causes." Perhaps there is no better reminder of this truth than the Yamim Nora'im. As we plead for a good year, the Machzor liturgy reminds us repeatedly that every aspect of our fate and the fate of our entire nation is in Hashem's hands. May we and all of Klal Yisrael be zocheh to a kesiva vachsima tovah for peace, good health and prosperity.

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

Please contact R' Ungar (Ymungar@gmail.com) with questions or comments

QUESTION: My shirt has spare buttons sewn in on the inside. May I wear it outside on שבת if I live in an area with no eruv? What if a button is loose, may I wear it outside?

ANSWER: Many poskim say that spare buttons which are commonly sewn on to an article of clothing become part of the בגד and is not considered carrying. Certainly, if the button is a very cheap button and easily replaceable then since it is not חשוב it becomes בטול to the בגד and not considered carrying. If a button is loose and still functional then it is not an issue at all. If, however, it is loose in a way that it is useless then it depends on the following. If it is a cheap button and you decide that you will not reuse it, then you can wear the garment as is. However, if it is a button that is not easily replaceable and you don't want to lose it, then you may not wear the garment as is. The reason is: When you decide that something is not going to be used, then it is considered an insignificant item which becomes subordinate to the garment, and it is not considered carrying. If you want the button, then it is חשוב and not subordinate, and since a very loose button has no function, it is considered carrying, unless you decide now on שבת that you will not reuse it.

המתירין בכפתורים מיותרים הם ר' משה פיינשטיין הובא בפוסקים ובחוברת לתורה והוראה ח"א עמוד ח'. ר' שז"א הובא בשש"כ פרק י"ח הערה קל"א. ר' פאלק במחזה אליהו ח"א סי' מ"ג בשם ר' משה ור' אלישב.
עי' מ"ב סי' ש"א ס"ק ק"נ לגבי הענין של כפתורים שנתרופף שכל שאין דעתו להשלים דבטל לגבי הבגד.

You can bring a zechus refuah sheleima for Sandy Bruck – Shalom ben Tila Leah – and for all who need a refuah sheleima by signing up for a weekly erev Shabbos contribution at https://pay.banquest.com/lightuptheworld and by joining the 2-3 minute daily shiur on the writings of the Chafetz Chaim.

A SHOT IN THE LEG

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Eliezer had a job, but wasn't making enough money to support his family. He tried various ways to supplement his income, but things were extremely difficult, and he wasn't able to make ends meet. At his wit's end, he made an appointment to visit his Rosh Yeshiva.

Eliezer met with his Rosh Yeshiva and discussed his struggles. The Rebbe listened very empathetically and prayed to Hashem that he would have a substantial and meaningful parnassah (livelihood), and that his financial situation would greatly improve. The Rebbe also promised him that he would see a yeshua and have parnassah in the near future.

Eliezer left the meeting uplifted and confident. He made a neder (vow), saying, "Hashem, if I indeed get a parnassah that allows me to support my family, I vow that instead of giving the usual 10% of my income for ma'aser (charity), I will give 20% of my income to my Rebbe's yeshiva, out of gratitude."

Shortly after, Eliezer was waiting at a bus stop in Eretz Yisrael. Tragically, the bus stop was attacked by a terrorist. The terrorist began firing indiscriminately at innocent civilians. Miraculously, no one was killed, but Eliezer was shot twice in his legs. He was rushed to the hospital and, before long, patched up—almost as good as new.

While he was recovering in the hospital, a man came in with an envelope. He explained that he represented an international organization that supports victims of terror and that they conduct annual fundraising efforts for victims. The man handed Eliezer a check for 1,000,000 shekels. Eliezer couldn't believe his eyes. The man reassured him, "There are no strings attached. This is for you to use in any way you wish."

Eliezer was overwhelmed, having never held so much money before. He decided to invest it and live off the dividends.

But then he remembered the blessing he had received from his Rebbe and the vow he had made. He realized that, according to his neder, he should immediately set aside 200,000 shekels for the yeshiva. However, he hesitated. This wasn't what he had meant when he made the vow.

He had expected to earn a good job to support his family, not to receive money after being shot in a terror attack. He would have much preferred not to get shot and not to receive the money. This wasn't a gain. Furthermore, this was a very rare occurrence. This is not what he had in mind.

Now Eliezer faced a dilemma: on one hand, he had made a vow, and here was the money. On the other hand, this wasn't the kind of income he had in mind when he made the neder. He wondered if he was really obligated to give 200,000 shekels to the yeshiva under these circumstances. What do you think?

See Upiryo Matok Devarim Page 317

Regarding last week's question about changing the scale, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok Devarim, page 306) answered as follows: While there are cases in halacha where one is allowed to use deception to protect themselves from someone trying to steal from them, this would not apply in the case of weights. Our Sages teach that changing weights is equivalent to a judge perverting justice, and this cannot be done simply to save money.

BECAUSE OF YOUR HONESTY, I WANT TO OPEN UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF BUSINESS FOR YOU HERE

Rabbi David Ashear shared the following story: Eli, a businessman who deals in various lines of brand-name merchandise, told me about an order he received from a customer in Algeria for 10,000 pieces of Samsonite luggage. Eli typically doesn't ship goods before receiving full payment. The check for the Algerian order arrived, and it was for $833,000. Eli deposited it and then called his customer to acknowledge receipt and inquire about when and where to ship the merchandise. The customer did not answer his phone. Eli continued trying to contact him by phone and email, but there was no response.

Nearly two weeks later, Eli received a phone call from the owner of a large chain of stores, who said he was expecting to receive the luggage from Eli's customer in Algeria. Unfortunately, the man had passed away suddenly. The store owner then asked, "May I buy the luggage directly from you for the price I was going to pay your customer?

The total was about $900,000." "No problem," Eli replied. Once again, he waited to receive the check and then proceeded to ship the luggage. At that point, Eli had $833,000 sitting in his account, of which no one was aware. However, Eli did not want to keep the money. He consulted his Rabbi, who quoted the Shulchan Aruch and said, "This is a great opportunity to make a kiddush Hashem." That's exactly what Eli wanted to do. He called the wife of his deceased customer in Algeria and told her that he wanted to return some money that belonged to her late husband. She thanked him and, somewhat oddly, asked if they could continue their conversation via Skype because, even though Eli had called her, she was being charged for the call. Eli gladly initiated the face-to-face computer conversation, happy that the woman would see him and his large kippah. "Oh," she said, "I see you're Jewish." "Yes," he replied, "and I'm very happy to return this money to you."

When he told her the substantial sum, she couldn't believe her ears. She thanked Eli profusely, and he mailed her the check.

About a week and a half later, a stretch limousine pulled up in front of Eli's office. A man entered and practically prostrated himself on the floor before him. Eli was bewildered. "What is this about?" he asked, helping the man to his feet. The man explained that he was from Dubai and a first cousin of the woman to whom Eli had returned the payment. "You're an angel," he said. "I'm very wealthy, and I have many rich friends in Dubai. Because of your honesty, I want to open up a whole new world of business for you here."

And that's exactly what happened. Over the past few years, Eli has made numerous multimillion-dollar sales to people in Dubai whom he had never met before. He has earned far more than the $833,000 he returned. Recently, he received an order from one of those customers for $11 million. Eli received and cashed the check, then called the customer to discuss shipping. However, he prefaced the conversation with a question. "I hope you don't mind me asking," he said. "I'm just curious. You've never met me, and I live on the other side of the world. How can you send me a check for $11 million, trusting that I'll send you the goods? I could just take the money and run."

The man on the other end of the line replied, "Listen very carefully to what I'm about to tell you. You didn't take the money of a dead man. Do you expect me to suspect that you're going to take the money of a live man?"

Eli has earned a great reputation. Dozens of non-Jews in Dubai are singing the praises of the Jewish people because of Eli's honesty. This is a true kiddush Hashem, and Eli has gained both in This World and the Next!

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Please join us for shiurim – Mishnayos, Gemara, Halacha, Tefilla, Parsha, Tehillim, Mussar and more! M-F 9:20 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. To register or if you have any questions please contact Rabbi Uri Greenspan - Rosh Bais Medrash at rabbigreenspan@firstseder.org 732-407-3178

You can now listen to Rabbi Greenspan's Dirshu Mishna Berura Shiur (Hilchos Shabbos) on the OU's All Halacha website: https://allhalacha.org/series/8525 or join us live as we are learning Mishna Berurah Chelek Gimmel (Hilchos Shabbos) M-F 10:50AM--11:20AM and Su, T, and Th 7:30PM-- 8:10PM