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

PARSHAS SHEMOS – THINK SMALL

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

Paroh instructed the Jewish midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill all the male infants as soon as they left the womb. However they refused to adhere to his demands. "But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the king of Mitzrayim spoke to them. And Hashem bestowed goodness on the midwives [and through their efforts] the people increased and became very strong. And because the midwives feared G-d, He made 'Houses' for them (i.e. dynasties of Kohanim and Davidic kings would descend from them)" (Shemos 1:17, 20-21).

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin asks why the Torah repeats the fact that the midwives feared Hashem. He suggests that in the first instance the Torah is describing their initial reaction – their fear of Hashem caused them to risk their lives and disobey Paroh. However, their reward came only after they continued to fear Hashem and bring more and more children into the ranks of Klal Yisrael. True, initially there was a great demonstration of their yiras shamayim, but could they keep it up day after day after day? People tend to have an initial surge of inspiration and determination, but it often wanes after a while. The greatness of Shifra and Puah was that they continued to fear Hashem day in and day out; and that was the reason they were deserving of such a great reward.

With this approach Rav Sorotzkin explains the following pasuk: "Those whose hope is in Hashem will have renewed strength…they will run and not grow tired, they will walk and not grow weary" (Yeshaya 40:31). Isn't it obvious that if they do not grow tired from running, they certainly will not become weary from walking? The answer is that their running merely reflected their initial burst of energy, while their "walking" is a metaphor for their continuous effort to plod onward. The pasuk is referring to those who trust in Hashem and will have the confidence to never lose hope even in the bleakest of times.

Rav Sorotzkin answers yet another question with this explanation. Hashem tested Avraham Avinu ten times culminating in the most difficult test, to offer his son Yitzchok as a sacrifice. Why was it necessary to test him ten times? If Avraham could pass the test of Akeidas Yitzchok, certainly he could have passed all of the easier ones. However, now we can see why this assumption is not necessarily true. Those tests took place over a protracted period of time. Even if Avraham would have marshaled the strength and the yiras shamayim to pass one big test, he may have not been able to endure the constant succession of smaller tests.

Nisyonos are part and parcel of everyone's life. From time to time, we may experience major difficult tests, and we are able to rise to the occasion. We may succeed due to a rush of adrenalin that produces the strength to stand firm. But for the majority of our lives, it is the little daily nisyonos which will be a greater measure of our level of commitment and the caliber of our spiritual tenacity. And because they are not so cataclysmic, we may not even recognize them as nisyonos. We might just forge ahead with our instinctive and often impulsive reactions. Stop and think: "This is a test" and it will go down on our record.

"Hashem does not bestow greatness on a person until He tests him with something small…There were two very great leaders [Moshe and Dovid] whom Hashem tested with a small matter (the tending of sheep). Once they demonstrated their trustworthiness, He elevated them to greatness" (Shemos Rabba 2:3). People become big from small things!

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

QUESTION: May one crush up potato chips on שבת to sprinkle on a salad? What about corn chips or pringles? Can one crush by hand nuts for a topping on ice cream?

ANSWER: The מלאכה of טוחן/grinding applies to anything that is גידולי קרקע/grows from the ground. There is also a rule of אין טוחן אחר טוחן, which means, once something was ground, there is no איסור to grind it again. For example, bread, cookies and pretzels are all made from flour that was ground once before, and even though right now the bread is whole, since the flour that it is made from was already ground, there is no איסור to grind it again. A potato chip is a slice of a potato that is deep fried or baked, grows from the ground, and was never ground before. One may not crush potato chips for a salad. Corn chips and pringles are made from corn/potato flour and are not subject to טוחן. A nut that is גידולי קרקע and is whole may not be crushed for ice cream. טוחן on שבת is only אסור if it's done in a normal fashion, if however, grinding with a שינוי/abnormal way, is okay on שבת. Crushing by hand is normal grinding. Using the bottom of a cup or plate or the handle of a utensil, is abnormal grinding. Crushing potato chips in a Ziplock bag with a handle of a knife, is abnormal and okay.

עי' סימן שכ"א סעי' ז' וסעי' י"ב ומשנה ברורה ס"ק כ"ה, ל', ול"א

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THE DOG ATE MY TEFILLIN

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

The Gemara in Baba Kama, Daf 3, discusses two paradigms of damages. One is called Keren, which literally means "horn," and the other is called Shen, which literally means "tooth." Keren refers to an animal, such as a cow or ox, using its horn to gore another animal or object. For example, let's say my ox leaves my property, goes into my neighbor's property, and gores their animal. In that case, this is categorized as Keren. Since goring is considered unusual behavior for a tame (Tam) animal, the owner's liability is reduced, and they are only required to pay half the damages.On the other hand, Shen refers to damage caused when an animal benefits or enjoys itself, such as by eating or consuming something. For example, if my cattle leave my property, enter my neighbor's property, and eat their vegetation, this is categorized as Shen. Because eating vegetation is normal and expected behavior for cattle, the owner is fully liable for the damage and must pay the full cost.

In short, Keren refers to intentional and unusual damaging behavior, with reduced liability (half damages), while Shen refers to behavior where the animal benefits itself, leading to full liability.

This leads us to the following true story:

In Israel, a man named Eli worked in a warehouse and needed to start work early. One morning, he brought his tefillin to work, put them on for davening, and then set them aside on a shelf.

Later that day, he heard a commotion and discovered that a dog from a neighboring warehouse had gotten into his warehouse. The dog, after finding the leather boxes and leather straps of the tefillin, chewed up and completely destroyed the tefillin. These tefillin were actually quite expensive, they cost $2000. Eli's loss was significant.

The owner of the dog was very apologetic and offered to pay for the damages. They both brought this question to Rav Zilberstein to determine how the case should be categorized according to Jewish law.

The question was: How do we classify this case? On the surface, it would appear to be a case of Shen. The dog used its teeth to destroy the tefillin. If it was Shen, the owner would have to pay the full $2000. But Shen applies when the animal eats something or benefits from it. When the dog chewed up the tefillin, was it trying to eat the leather, thinking it was food? Perhaps it should be categorized as Keren (intentional damage). If it is Keren, the owner would only be liable to pay $1000 damages because intentional damaging behavior is less typical.

The issue boils down to whether the tefillin should be seen as "food" in this context or as something the dog simply wanted to destroy. If it was food, the owner has more liability and needs to pay $2000. If it was simply looking to destroy, then the owner has less liability and needs to pay $1000.

What do you think? See Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kama, Page 49.

Regarding last week's question about the need to give maaser, Rav Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok Devarim Page 487) wrote that the man had the right to acquire the money for the sole purpose of paying his debt. In that case, since the money was not regular income, it would not require maaser.

PAID IN FULL WITH A CUP OF HOT COCOA

Rabbi David Ashear shared the following beautiful story. Many years ago, in New York, a family was having trouble making ends meet. It got to the point where the father had no choice but to ask for handouts. He would send his oldest son, Jacob, knocking on doors in Jewish communities, requesting tzedakah. Jacob would be given a couple of dollars here and a couple of dollars there, and it would help support the family. Jacob always wanted to become a doctor, and his family wanted to support him as much as they could. Every night, when Jacob came back with money, his parents would take a dollar or two and set it aside for his future medical education. In the winter, in the freezing cold, it was especially difficult for Jacob to make his rounds. One night, he knocked on a door that had a sign outside: Levinstein Family. A young woman opened the door. "Please," Jacob said, "if you could give me just a little tzedakah, I would appreciate it." She checked her pockets for money, but didn't have any. Her father yelled down from upstairs, "Noa! Who's there?" "Someone for tzedakah!" she called back. "Enough with these collectors!" the father screamed in anger. "They come all the time! Don't give them a penny." The young lady felt bad. Well, if she couldn't offer him money, she could at least offer him a hot drink. She invited Jacob to come in for a minute and made him a cup of hot cocoa. Jacob could not remember the last time he drank something so delicious. The warm house and the warm beverage re-energized him, and he left in good spirits, thanking the nice young woman, Noa Levinstein, for her hospitality.

Twenty-two years later, Jacob was the top physician in his field and head of his unit in the hospital where he worked. One day, a patient was brought in with a rare, life-threatening illness. Her name was Noa Markovitz, and her father's name was Abe Levinstein (this information was filled out as part of her registration). Jacob remembered the name Noa Levinstein. This was the girl who had given him hot cocoa years earlier! From that moment on, Jacob went above and beyond anything a doctor would normally do for a patient. He personally paid for very expensive medications that the hospital did not provide. He flew in a doctor who he knew would be able to help. The treatment and care lasted for almost a year at the end of this time, Noa was back to normal. The time came for her to be discharged, and her husband and children were anxiously waiting in the hallway to bring her home. Her husband was given a large bill for the extensive treatments, somewhere in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. At the end of the bill were written the words: "Paid in full with a cup of hot cocoa." Noa's little deed was something that Jacob would never forget. He repaid her for it many, many times over because it was so precious to him.

All our deeds are unimaginably precious to Hashem and He will pay us for every one of them in the future, many, many times over.

Good Shabbos!