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

PARSHAS YISRO – LOVE AND SERVITUDE

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos (88a) states that as Bnai Yisrael stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, Hashem held the mountain over their heads. He thus threatened them, "If you will accept the Torah, fine, and if not, this will be your burial site." Tosfos asks, "Since Bnai Yisrael had already declared, 'Naaseh venishma – we will do and we will hear' - why was there any need for coercion?"

Rav Zeidel Epstein explains that naaseh venishma was an expression of Bnai Yisrael's love of Hashem. However, they had not yet accepted his malchus, his sovereignty. They had not yet submitted themselves to being servants of Hashem as Master of the Universe. The ultimate level of service is to be an eved Hashem – a servant of Hashem – as Moshe is described in the concluding verses of the Torah. Therefore by holding the mountain over them, Hashem demonstrated that accepting the Torah required more than just their good will. They were shown that Hashem also expected their complete submission and servitude.

Perhaps if we delve into the words of Chazal, we can demonstrate the veracity of Rav Zeidel's approach. From another discussion in the Gemara (ibid) it becomes apparent that the response of naaseh venishma was motivated by strong feelings of love of Hashem. The Gemara relates that a heretic chided Rava: "You are a hasty people, you put your mouth before your ears [when you said naaseh venishma]. You should have first heard what Mitzvos are written in the Torah to determine if you could undertake them before committing yourselves." Rava responded, "We proceeded with perfect trust in Hashem, as is the way of those who act out of love (see Rashi). We were sure that He would not impose on us that which was beyond our ability to do." Rava's response clearly demonstrates that the declaration of naaseh venishma was an act of blind love. At the awe-inspiring moment that they stood at the foot of Har Sinai, they rose to the lofty level of sublime love of Hashem.

However, as we shall see, this was merely the first step. In the first of the Ten Commandments, Hashem proclaims, "I am Hashem your G-d". The Ramban explains that this was not a Mitzvah but rather a precondition to the other commandments. He cites the Mechilta (41,1) which explains it with a mashal: A king entered a city in his realm, whereupon his subjects cried out, "Make laws and decrees for us." To which he responded, "First accept my sovereignty and then I will issue decrees." Thus Hashem declared, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim. First accept my sovereignty, then accept my Mitzvos." We see that naaseh venishma was not enough. Hashem was saying, "Certainly I appreciate your love, but you must also become My servants."

Our primary relationship with Hashem must be as His avadim – His servants. The raison d'etre of Yetzias Mitzrayim was to turn Klal Yisrael from Paroh's servants into Hashem's servants. Thus Hashem avers, "They are My servants whom I have taken out of the land of Mitzrayim" (Vayikra 25:42). A servant is one who is duty bound to do Hashem's will no matter how hard, or what degree of sacrifice is required.

Every day when we say the Shema we set our priorities straight. First we accept ol malchus Shamayim – the yoke of the Kingship of Heaven. Then we continue with, "You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart." It is our service of Hashem through love which turns coerced servitude into embraced servitude. Accordingly, Rav Zeidel concludes his Dvar Torah with a quote from Tefillas Maariv: "And they willingly accepted His Kingship upon themselves!"

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

QUESTION: If I am making 5 pounds of dough to make challah for Shabbos, and I want to take off a little dough to make a babka cake or some rugelach, do I make the ברכה on the הפרשת חלה or not? Should I rather not take off from the dough?

ANSWER: When making dough, especially for שבת, one should try and make an amount that would require הפרשת חלה with a ברכה. It is a כבוד for שבת to do so. Most follow the שיעור of the חזון איש when it comes to making a ברכה which is 5 pounds/approximately 16-18 cups of flour. This means one should not make a ברכה if making less than 5 pounds. For less than 2.5 pounds no חלה is taken off, and from 2.5 pounds – 4.99 pounds one takes off חלה without a ברכה. If one makes two separate doughs and then combines them to make the same product, they combine to be able to make a ברכה and to take off חלה. If, however, one makes a 5-pound dough and then splits them to make two different products, like challah and rugelach, then they do not combine for חלה. So, if you are making a 5-pound dough and you want to make a ברכה then you may not split it. If you insist on splitting it, then as long as you have 2.5 pounds of one product you must do הפרשת חלה, but without a ברכה.

עי' רמ"א סימן רמ"ב סעי' א'. עי' יו"ד סימן שכ"ו סעי' א' ועי' שמירת שבת כהלכתה פרק מ"ב סעי' י"א.

Weekly riddle: For which פרי העץ fruit are you <u>not</u> יוצא if you make a האדמה on it? Bonus riddle:

Bonus riddle: What is the only הלכה in Shulchan Aruch regarding Tu B'shvat? Answers on the back

THE GROUND CARP

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Avi, who lived in Israel, saw a large advertisement for the local Jewish supermarket promoting carp fish for 15 shekels per kilo. Usually, it was 30 shekels per kilo, but the ad stated it had been reduced from 30 to 15 shekels, calling it a "great deal."

Excited about the discount, Avi went to the store to purchase the fish. At the fish counter, he asked for six kilos. The clerk handed it to him, and Avi then requested that they grind it up, as his wife made delicious homemade gefilte fish.

At the register, Avi expected to pay 15 X 6 = 90 shekels. He handed over his credit card, and the fish was rung up. However, when he received his receipt, the total came to 180 shekels. Confused, he questioned the price.

The clerk explained, "Actually, the price is still 30 per kilo unless you meet the conditions of the sale. If you look closely, there is an asterisk, and the fine print states that to get the 15-per-kilo price, you must buy 300 shekels'worth of fish. Until you reach that amount, the price remains at 30 per kilo, which is why your total is 180."

Avi was surprised. "I didn't realize there was a condition," he said. "I never buy 300 shekels' worth of fish. I'd like my money back, please." The clerk, however, refused. "Sorry, but the fish has already been ground up, so we can't process a return."

Avi later brought this issue to a rav for guidance. He argued that the condition wasn't stated clearly—it was only written in fine print. He felt it was unfair that he was forced to pay the higher price and then unable to back out due to a lack of transparency. The store countered by saying that most customers understood the deal and that it was standard practice—the discount only applied if all the conditions were met.

What do you think? According to the Torah, is Avi entitled to a refund? Was the store being deceptive, or is this simply a case of a customer not reading the fine print carefully enough? See Upiryo Matok, Devarim, Page 171.

Regarding last week's question about the "buy one, get one free" sale and whether it is permitted to return the purchased suit in order to keep the free suit, Rav Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok, Devarim, page 168) answered that, technically speaking, there is nothing halachically forbidden about this. However, it is not proper to do so because it violates the principle of "speaking truth in your heart." This is similar to the famous story of Rav Safra, who was in the middle of reciting Shema when someone approached him with an offer to buy an item. Thinking that Rav Safra was not interested, the buyer kept increasing his offer. When Rav Safra finished Shema, he insisted on selling the item for the original price, as that was the amount he had committed to in his heart. Similarly, in this case, when the person initially bought the suit, he was satisfied with it. Changing his mind later in order to exploit the sale would be an example of not upholding the truth in one's heart.

HE ARRANGED FOR THE DOCTOR'S OWN WIFE TO MAKE THE CALL

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro told the following incredible story.

Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Rosenblatt, residents of Florida, live a comfortable life. Dr. Rosenblatt is a top oncologist, well-respected in his field.

One day, several years ago, Mrs. Rosenblatt was driving on the highway when she noticed an old, beat-up car several lanes over with a "For Sale" sign in the window. On a whim, she decided to call the number. As she later recounted the story to Rabbi Shapiro, she paused and admitted, "I have no idea why I called. My husband and I both have brand-new cars. We had absolutely no need for an old one." A young man answered the phone. "I just saw your advertisement," she said. "May I ask why you're selling your car?

"Again," she paused in her retelling. "I have no idea why I asked that question either. He could have easily told me it was none of my business." But instead of dismissing her, the young man broke down in tears. "My wife and I got married a few years ago. We were living happily in South America until she was diagnosed with a severe illness. We came to South Florida for treatment, but every doctor we saw told us the same thing: 'The only doctor who can help you now is Dr. Joseph Rosenblatt.' But we don't have insurance here... so I'm selling my car just to afford an appointment with him."

Mrs. Rosenblatt was stunned. "Dr. Rosenblatt is my husband," she told him. "Go pick up your wife right now and bring her to the hospital. I'm calling my husband—he will treat her at no charge." Indeed, Dr. Rosenblatt was able to help save the young woman's life.

The man was desperately searching for a doctor, and Hashem not only led him to the right one—He arranged for the doctor's own wife to make the call, offering the appointment free of charge.

Hashem orchestrates every detail of our lives. He connects us to the right people at the right time. And when we turn to Him, we are never alone. A song based on this story can be heard at bit.ly/tabletalksong.

Answer to weekly riddle: A fruit that was grown in a flower pot with no hole at the bottom (based on the Chaya Adam Hl. Birchas Hanehenin 51:17- Harav Hagaon R, Dov Landau Shlita)

Answer to bonus riddle: Not to say תחנון on Tu B'Shvat. (O.Ch. 131:6). Eating fruits is not mentioned in S.Aruch. It is the Mogen Avraham who quotes this Minhag Ashkenaz.

Good Shabbos!