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

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PARSHAS CHUKAS – HASHEM RUNS THE WORLD

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

After the conclusion of the forty years of wandering in the Wilderness, Bnai Yisrael prepared to enter the land of Canaan. Traveling along the southeastern border of the Promised Land they passed by the countries of Moav and Ammon. Hashem commanded Moshe that Bnai Yisrael are forbidden to do battle with Moav and Ammon for their lands were granted as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot. Since these lands were off limits for Bnai Yisrael, they were forced to circle around them, proceeding northward toward the Emorite kingdom ruled by Sichon.

The Torah mentions that Sichon had previously waged war against Ammon and Moav and had captured a major portion of both countries. The Emorites were jubilant over their conquest. Their victory was celebrated by their poets: "Come to Cheshbon – let it be built and established as the city of Sichon… Woe to you Moav…their sovereignty over Cheshbon was lost" (Bamidbar 21: 27-30).

Rav Yaakov Galinsky takes note of the irony of this turn of events. While Sichon thought that he had conquered the lands of Ammon and Moav for himself, he had really taken possession of them on behalf of Bnai Yisrael. Since those territories no longer belonged to Ammon and Moav, they became eligible to be acquired by Bnai Yisrael. Therefore, when BnaiYisrael fought Sichon and conquered his entire land, they also took possession of major cities of Ammon and Moav. Thus, the Gemara (Gittin 38a) states, "Ammon and Moav were purified by Sichon."

While Sichon and his people rejoiced over their acquisition of Moavite and Ammonite territory, Hashem had other plans. Sichon was merely a pawn in the transfer of these lands to Bnai Yisrael. There is a Yiddish expression: "A mench tracht un G-t lacht." A man thinks [about his plans] but Hashem laughs – because He runs the world.

Rav Galinsky cites the Gemara in Avodah Zara (40b). Rebbi Yehuda Hanasi suffered from a stomach ailment. Rebbi Yishmael told Rebbi Yehuda that his father had suffered from the same malady, and he was cured by drinking apple cider which had been aged for seventy years. A search for the precious cider was conducted and they found a gentile who had 300 barrels of seventy year old apple cider. Now why did this family save these hundreds of barrels of apple cider for seventy years? Unbeknownst to them, they were really saving them for Rebbi Yehuda. Thus, Rebbi Yehuda declared, "Blessed is the Omnipresent Who entrusted His world to reliable caretakers!"

The Rambam, in his introduction to his commentary on Mishnayos, describes a theoretical situation in which a wealthy man built a magnificent palace which he did not ostensibly need. Yet this great mansion will have fulfilled its purpose when a very pious person comes many years later and finds shelter from the blazing sun in the shade of one of its walls. In Hashem's master plan there was no other purpose for its existence. He orchestrated its existence because He runs the world.

Megilas Esther is replete with such phenomena. Just one example demonstrates this point beyond any doubt. For whom did Haman build the gallows? For Mordechai? No, for himself and his ten sons. Who orchestrated that? The One Who runs the world.

When Columbus set sail westward toward "India" in 1492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, why did he discover America? To find new routes for commerce? To prove that the world wasn't flat? Not really. It was to prepare a land of refuge for millions of Jews fleeing persecution and tyranny all over the Eurasian continent and ultimately facilitate the proliferation of Torah across the entire United States.

Whether we are studying world history or discussing current events or evaluating events in our own lives, if we look closely enough, we will find this phenomenon over and over again, because it is Hashem Who runs the world!

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

QUESTION: Is it מותר to heat up cold cooked string beans שבתmorning on top of my crock pot? Does it make a difference if there is liquid in the pan as well?

ANSWER: The rule for solid foods is אין בישול אחר בישול, which means, once a food was cooked/baked there is no דאיסורto heat it up again on שבתeven to יד סולדת. The reason is: reheating a baked/cooked food doesn't change the food in a significant way and is not the מלאכהof cooking. However, if there is more than just an insignificant amount of liquid in the pan, then heating up that liquid is אסור. The rule for liquids is יש בישול אחר בישול, which means, even if liquid was once cooked, after it cools off you may not reheat it. Heating up a cooled liquid is a significant act because the main purpose of cooking by liquid is the fact that it is hot. If there is only a small amount of liquid in the pan, not enough to act as a gravy then it is okay. Even if the gravy congealed and it is technically a solid, Ashkenazim may not place the pan in a place that will melt the gravy since that is considered מוליד/creating something new. One can remove the string beans and place them in another pan and then place it on top of a pot. This act of בוררof taking the "good" from the "bad" is okay if done סמוך לסעודה.

עי' או"ח סימן שי"ח סעי' ד' וט"ו לגבי בישול אחר בישול. ועי' שם סעי' ט"ז לגבי השומן קרוש שנימוח.

***Question*:**

From the time we got the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, until the second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, how many paros adumos did we have?

TUG-OF-WAR OVER TALENT

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

I'm still writing this from Eretz Yisrael, with one final Shabbos here. With much siyata dishmaya, we were finally able to get tickets to return home. Things here feel so normal, so beautiful—you could hardly imagine that just a short while ago, all of Klal Yisrael were storming the gates of Heaven because our people were in grave danger. Thank You, Hashem! Let me share a true story with you.

Sam was a Jewish owner of a very successful technology company. He built a large and thriving business. There was also another Jewish owner of a huge technology company named Mark. Wanting to compete with Sam, Mark approached the top AI researchers at Sam's company and offered them $100 million to leave and join his company— and they did.

Sam went to Mark and said, "What are you doing? You can't just take my employees." Mark responded, "You don't own them. You could also offer them more money. It's a free country, and I'm allowed to do this."

What is the Torah perspective on this situation? There's the concept of ani hamehapech b'charara—you're not allowed to jump in and buy something if another person is in the process of acquiring it. There's also the principle of hasagas gevul—you are not permitted to encroach on another person's livelihood or property. However, perhaps those principles don't apply here.

Ani hamehapech b'charara typically refers to interfering when someone is actively trying to acquire something, and in this case, people cannot be "owned." Hasagas gevul might not apply either, since Sam's company remains highly successful and lucrative. Perhaps it is not forbidden.

What do you think the Torah's approach would be in this scenario? Is Mark allowed to "poach" and lure away Sam's employees?

Regarding last week's question, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Shabbos Besimcha Page 251) answered that normally it is forbidden to use such deceitful practices, as it is geneivas daas (deceit). However, when it comes to honoring one's parents, there is a difference. Honoring one's parents is actually a debt that we owe them. Just as when someone owes a debt and refuses to pay, it is permissible to use geneivas daas to reclaim that debt, so too with honoring parents: if children do not fulfill their obligation, it is permitted to use such a method to encourage them to pay that debt. May we all merit never having to resort to such practices to claim what is owed.

HE BEGAN DISCUSSING THE SUBJECT OF THE DERASHAH WITH HIM, GENTLY POSING QUESTIONS AND OFFERING INSIGHTS

Psychologist Yaakov Guttman, who works with youth at risk, related that he acquired his educational outlook from Rav Yaakov Edelstein. He related the following story.

It happened one Shabbos morning. An elderly Jew, around ninety years old, who had learned in a yeshivah in Europe as a young man before the Holocaust, approached Rav Edelstein and asked if he could share a short devar Torah before Krias HaTorah. This wasn't the usual routine, so Rav Edelstein told him he needed to ask permission from the gabbaim.

However, the guest did not do this. After Kaddish, he stood up to deliver his devar Torah. "Birshus ha'gabbaim," he began. As far as he was concerned, this constituted permission. We were somewhat confused, but we prepared ourselves to listen respectfully.

It soon became clear that the elderly man's mind was no longer fully coherent. Although he had clearly learned a great deal of Torah in his lifetime, his words now lacked clarity and coherence. It was uncomfortable, and even somewhat embarrassing. As the guest continued his derashah, several minutes passed. Some men in the congregation started losing patience. A few began calling out to him to stop, but he persisted.

Eventually, these interruptions intensified, becoming rude. Finally, the elderly man stopped and sat down, allowing us to proceed with the Torah reading. I felt uncomfortable with the situation. True, he had imposed on the tzibbur, but it was evident that he was speaking sincerely and from the heart. In his perspective, he felt obligated to deliver his derashah. Although I wasn't among those who shouted, I still felt badly about what had occurred.

Afterward, I noticed Rav Edelstein approaching the elderly man. He warmly thanked him for the devar Torah, then began discussing the subject of the derashah with him, gently posing questions and offering insights. I watched as Rav Edelstein patiently sat and discussed the sugya with the elderly Jew, despite the fact that the man's original presentation had lacked logical sequence. By treating his derashah seriously, Rav Edelstein provided him with a profound sense of dignity and self-worth.

In a world filled with challenges, this is where Rav Edelstein's greatness lay, in his ability to give others a feeling of importance and belonging. When I encounter struggling teens, I can't help but wish that this attitude could serve as a guideline for all of us: recognizing that every individual is important and worthy.

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Answer: Nine: Moshe processed the first, Ezra the second, and there were 7 from Ezra until the churban. The 10th will be processed by Mashiach, hopefully soon.

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