1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah

A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

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TESHUVA – IT'S NOT ALL BLACK OR WHITE

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan on Yom Kippur

The premise upon which our obligation to observe the Mitzvos of the Torah is based is that we have *bechira* – free will, the ability to choose between good and evil. Rav Eliyahu Dessler presents a beautiful *mashal* to help us understand the limits of our *bechira.* In a conventional war where two countries meet on the battlefield, their point of contact is a place that neither country controls. The area behind Army A belongs to Country A and the area behind Army B belongs to Country B. The area in between is presently the point of conflict. If Army A captures this territory it is annexed to Country A and the battleground may then move into an area previously controlled exclusively by Country B.

The same scenario applies to our war against the *yeitzer hara*. There are areas entirely under the control of our *yeitzer tov,* over which our *yeitzer hara* has no dominion. There are other areas completely under the control of the *yeitzer hara,* over which the *yeitzer tov* has no sway. These two areas are not truly subject to our *bechira* since no battle of wills is involved. For example, there is no way that "Shimon" could possibly eat a cheeseburger; no decision needs to be made. On other hand Shimon cannot possibly stay up all night on Yom Kippur saying Tehillim; it is not even on his radar screen.

However, when it comes to speaking *lashon hara*, a real battle takes place between the *yeitzer tov* and the *yeitzer hara.* Rav Dessler refers to this battle front as our *nekudas habechira* – the point where choices actually take place. This is the point where we are truly using our *bechira*. If Shimon can totally vanquish the *yeitzer hara* of speaking *lashon hara,* then that territory will come under the control of his *yeitzer tov* and will no longer be an area of conflict. He will no longer be tempted to speak *lashon hara.*

For the sake of simplicity let us call the domain of the *yeitzer hara* the black area, the domain of the *yeitzer tov* the white area and the point of conflict the gray area. This model applies to all Mitzvos and aveiros, some being in the black zone, some in the white zone and some in the gray zone. Moreover there many Mitzvos which in some situations are in the white zone, in other situations in the gray zone and yet other situations in the black zone. And in truth there is indeed a lot of gray area.

While all year round our focus may be primarily on the gray areas, when the Yamim Nora'im arrive, we begin to look at the whole picture. What does the obligation of Teshuva require of us? Obviously none of us can become perfect overnight. Or to put it another way: there is no way that we can turn all the black area into white. What we should attempt to do is push back the point of conflict by bringing some the gray under the control of the *yeitzer tov* and attempt to bring some the black into the gray area.

In other words the *avoda* of Yom Kippur is to move forward with an elevated *nekudas habechira* which we should strive to maintain throughout the coming year.

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

QUESTION: My son went shopping today in the עשרת ימי תשובה and amongst the nosh he bought for שבת were Herr's pretzels. May we eat them now that they are here?

ANSWER: During the עשרת ימי תשובה one may only eat פת ישראל. During the year one is allowed to eat פת פלתר (bread of a professional baker) as long as it has a good hechsher. Many only eat פת ישראל a whole year, but even those that don't, during the עשרת ימי תשובה one must only eat פת ישראל. The משנה ברורה also says that on שבת and יו"ט one should only eat פת ישראל. Included in פת is bread and all bread like products which are called פת הבא בכיסנין which includes cookies, crackers, pretzels, danishes, pita, pie crusts, etc. Regarding breakfast cereals, there is a מחלוקת if it has an appearance of bread and one should ask their Rov. Cereals made from rice or corn flour are certainly not considered פת and are allowed. Some avoid cheerios and some allow it. The reason we stay away from non פת ישראל in these days is to help us elevate ourselves and to ingrain that we are different from the גוים and that we have to live with קדושה. It is only 10 days (really less since two are fast days), and we should enjoy the spiritual lift. Back to the pretzels. On שבת you shouldn't eat it a whole year, but during the עשרת ימי תשובה you may not eat it. Give to your cleaning lady or put it away safely until after יום כיפור when מין הדין it is okay, but don't use it for your שבת nosh!

עי' סימן תר"ג סעי' א'. עי' יו"ד סימן קי"ב סעי' א' וב'. ועי' שם בש"ך ס"ק ט'. עי' משנה ברורה סימן רמ"ב ס"ק ו' שכ' בשבת ויו"ט נכון ליזהר שלא לאכול כי אם מפת ישראל מפני כבוד השבת ויו"ט.

THE CASHMERE COAT

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Esther's cousin from England sent her a beautiful long cashmere coat. When Esther received it she realized that it must have been very expensive. She decided it would be better to save it for Shabbos and not wear it on weekdays.

One cold day, Esther went into a small clothing store to look for a weekday coat. She asked where the coats were, and the shopkeeper directed her. She found one she wanted to try on. Esther took off her cashmere coat, set it aside on a rack temporarily, and went to the mirror to try on the new one.

While she was trying it on, another customer entered the store. The customer saw Esther's cashmere coat, admired it, and brought it to the counter. The store owner didn't recognize the coat, but he assumed it must have been older stock. When the customer asked how much it cost, he quickly said, "Just 200 shekels." The customer happily paid and left with the bargain.

Meanwhile, Esther finished trying on the weekday coat and looked around for her cashmere coat, but it was gone. She searched everywhere and then asked the owner if he had seen it. The owner suddenly realized what must have happened. He told her, "I'm so sorry, I feel terrible. Someone must have just purchased your coat by mistake."

Esther was shocked. "What? That's my coat! How could you sell it?"

The owner apologized again, but Esther insisted, "You need to pay me. My coat is worth $1,000."

The owner replied, "I'll do whatever the Rav says."

So the question became: Who is responsible for the coat? Was it Esther's fault for leaving her coat on the rack, meaning the store owner doesn't have to pay anything? Should the store owner at least pay the 200 shekels he received for it? Or is the store owner fully responsible, since he sold something that wasn't his and should have checked more carefully, meaning he owes Esther the full $1,000? What do you think? Is the store owner responsible, or is it Esther? See V'haarev Na Volume Four Hebrew Edition, Page 206.

Regarding last week's question about the COVID minyan, Rabbi Zilberstein (V'haarev Na Volume Four Hebrew Edition, Page 210) answered that the second group of 10 who joined the minyan are obligated to pay for the fine of the first ten because they caused the fine to be given. However, because this is a grama (an indirect action), they could not be forced by a human court (midinei adam), and they would have to pay m'dinei shamayim (according to the laws of Heaven).

THE OVERSIZED MACHZOR

The Steipler Gaon once made a surprise appearance at a bar mitzvah seudah to which he had not been invited. He wished the father "Mazel tov," then sat down next to the bar mitzvah boy, spoke with him briefly, and left.

After the Steipler departed, the bar mitzvah boy explained what happened.

Several years earlier, the Steipler had seen him enter the Lederman Shul on Yom Kippur carrying a large sefer, which the Steipler assumed was a Gemara. He told the boy, "Yinge'le (young boy), now we are to daven; learning is for later." The boy then showed the Steipler that he was not carrying a Gemara but an oversized machzor.

Since the mechilah (forgiveness) of a kattan (a boy under bar mitzvah age) is not valid, the Steipler wanted to make sure to ask for forgiveness at the first possible opportunity. He therefore noted the boy's name and later made sure to find out when and where the bar mitzvah celebration would be held, so that he could personally attend and ask for forgiveness as soon as the boy reached the age to be able to forgive. Reprinted with permission from Table Talk.

GOOD SHABBOS
GMAR CHASIMA TOVA