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

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL–PEKUDEI – GREAT FEATS

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

The Ramban observes that none of those who volunteered to craft the Mishkan, its intricate vessels and the magnificent priestly garments had any training in these skills. Nor did any of them possess any particular talents required for this complicated venture. The Ramban goes on to explain: "However, each one found within himself the capacity to do it. 'And his heart was proud in the ways of Hashem' (Divrei Hayamim II, 17,6). They came to Moshe and said to him, 'I will do all that my master states.'"

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz comments that people possess many latent talents and strengths which come to the fore in exceptional circumstances. When Yaakov noticed Rachel approaching the well with her father's sheep, he removed the rock which covered the well. This rock was so heavy that it normally took numerous men to lift it. From where did Yaakov derive this awesome strength? Was he a muscle-bound weight lifter or some type of superman? "No," insists Rav Chaim. He explains that the answer can be found in Tefillas Geshem (the prayer for rain recited on Shemini Atzeres): "He focused his heart and rolled the stone off the well of water... For his sake do not withhold water." Had the act of removing the rock been due to Yaakov's great strength, we could not invoke it as a zechus for rain. Rather it was his ability to focus his heart and summon all his physical strength which enabled him to accomplish this remarkable feat.

Let us explain what it was that motivated Yaakov to act so intensely. Yaakov was really doing this on behalf of his mother. It was his mother who enabled him receive the berachos instead of Eisav. It was his mother who saved his life by informing him of Eisav's intent to kill him. He owed everything to his mother. This idea is really expressed clearly in the pasuk: "And it was, when Yaakov saw Rachel, the daughter of Lavan his mother's brother, and the flock of Lavan his mother's brother, Yaakov came forward and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother" (Bereishis 29,10). How many times does the Torah need to remind us that Lavan was his mother's brother?! It was his intense desire to come to the aid of his mother's brother that produced the energy and strength to remove the rock and water the sheep. (See also Malbim ad loc.)

(This might help us understand why Yaakov inexplicably "kissed Rachel and raised his voice and cried." Seeing Rachel reminded him of his mother whom he hadn't seen for fourteen years. He was essentially kissing his mother and that is why he cried.)

This remarkable capacity of Yaakov to marshal all his latent strength also enabled him to learn in the Bais Hamedrash of Shem and Ever for fourteen years straight without a decent night's sleep. (See Rashi Bereishis 28,11.)

Rav Chaim takes the same approach in explaining another "superhuman" event. When the daughter of Paroh saw a basket in the water with a baby inside, "she extended her hand to reach it." Rashi cites the Gemara (Sotah 12b) that her hand "extended many cubits" in order to reach the basket. Rav Chaim refuses to conclude that a miracle happened to make her arm extremely long and a second miracle occurred to restore her arm to its normal size. Rather, he suggests that Paroh's daughter was so determined to save the child in the basket, that she extended herself - mustering every ounce of energy to get to the basket.

Rav Chaim asserts that this phenomenon is not reserved only for great people or for times of emergency. Each of us has many latent strengths and talents which can be evoked by extending ourselves beyond our perceived ability. When our hearts are "proud in the ways of Hashem," we can accomplish our own "superhuman" feats.

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

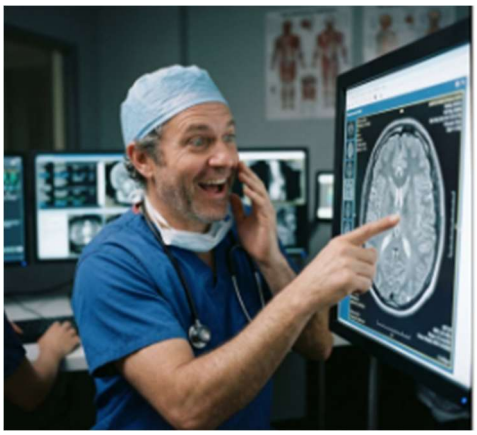
QUESTION: May one spill out the excess water from tuna in a can? May one spill out fat from the top of soup? May one spill out excess liquid from a watery cholent?

ANSWER: When it comes to בורר there has to be a תערובות/mixture in order for there to be an act of בורר. If we establish that there is no mixture, then there won't be any issues of sorting. שלחן ערוך tells us clearly that when one has a barrel of wine and there is sediment that settled to the bottom, all the wine that is above the sediment is not considered mixed with the sediment. Therefore, even if one is taking wine not for immediate use, one may pour out wine and continue pouring until the wine starts to come out slowly from between the sediment, since all the wine that flows nicely is not considered mixed with the sediment. At the point when the wine starts to drip out slowly, that wine is considered mixed with the sediment and you must stop pouring. In a tuna can, soup or cholent, the excess liquid that pours out freely in a nice stream is not considered mixed with the food and is not subject to בורר, and therefore is allowed to be poured out. While pouring out water from tuna, once the stream of water turns to droplets, you must stop pouring.

עי' סימן שי"ט סעי' י"ד ומ"ב ס"ק נ"ג (וכל הסעי') וזכור ושמור דף 328 - 332

THE HAPPY ACCIDENT

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner



Sarah, a young woman, caught a serious virus that caused swelling in her brain. Because of this illness, she developed a condition called post-viral aphasia. The virus damaged the part of her brain that controls speech. Sarah could still understand what people were saying to her, but she could not form words herself. She simply could not speak. It was a heartbreaking situation.

Some time later, unrelated to the virus, Chaim was driving his car. He was not paying enough attention and accidentally hit Sarah. She was thrown into the air and landed hard on the ground. She broke several bones and hit her head and was rushed to the hospital. Over time, she slowly recovered from her broken bones and other injuries.

However, during her recovery something remarkable happened. Hashem gave the human brain an amazing ability to adapt and reorganize itself after an injury. Sometimes when one part of the brain is damaged, other parts can learn to take over the lost function. In Sarah's case, the virus had damaged the speech centers on the left side of her brain. While her brain was healing from the accident, it began to reorganize. Other areas of the brain gradually started doing the work of producing speech. New pathways formed that allowed her brain to send speech signals again. Little by little, Sarah began to speak. Before the accident, she could not talk at all. After her recovery, she could.

Chaim felt terrible about what he had done. He knew that his careless driving had caused Sarah serious injuries. After she recovered, he wanted to offer to pay her compensation for the harm he caused. But an unusual question came up. Does Chaim actually have to pay? On one hand, he clearly caused real damage. Sarah suffered broken bones, pain, and a dangerous head injury because of his mistake. On the other hand, during the recovery from that very injury, Sarah's brain reorganized and she regained her ability to speak, something she had lost before the accident. In a certain way, Chaim permanently helped Sarah.

What do you think? Should Chaim be required to pay for the harm he caused? Or could someone argue that, in the end, the accident actually left Sarah better off than she was before? See Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 416

Regarding last week's question about the funeral, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Nedarim page 343) wrote that it would not be permitted to exhume the body. However, regarding the second idea, he said that if this would prevent a major argument within the family, it would be considered a merit, a zchus for the soul of the deceased, to take a manikin wrap it in tachrichim, and hold another "Levaya." This should only be done if extreme care is taken to ensure that the family does not discover what was under the tachrichim.

"REBBI... IS THAT YOU?"

The bachurim were sitting in the beis midrash learning when the first shots rang out, causing them to freeze in place. For months, rumors of the Bolshevik Revolution and distant reports of fighting had reached their small village, but the conflict had always seemed like something happening far beyond the horizon. Inside the walls of the yeshivah, they had continued their studies under the guidance of the great Rav Shimon Shkop, finding that as long as their Gemaras were open, the outside world felt safely distant. Now, however, the war had arrived with the sound of gunfire that was far too close. As fear crept across their faces, the fragile calm they had maintained through the discussions of Abaye and Rava was shattered by the sound of marching boots and shouted orders. They had all heard the terrible stories of young men being taken by soldiers and sent to distant places, never to be heard from again. Many of these students were barely more than children who had come only to learn Torah, never imagining they would stand face to face with an army.

Suddenly, the door burst open and armed soldiers stormed into the room, shouting for everyone to line up against the wall. The bachurim instinctively turned toward their rebbi, who quietly closed his Gemara and motioned for them to comply. As they formed a line, Rav Shimon stood at the front; though he was not physically imposing, his steady presence brought a measure of calm to his terrified students. The soldiers raised their rifles as the commanding officer stepped forward, but before any violence could occur, Rav Shimon spoke in a steady voice, telling the officer they were prepared to comply with their requirements. Instead of responding with an order, the officer simply stared at Rav Shimon, studying his face as if searching a distant memory. To everyone's surprise, he finally asked almost hesitantly, "Rebbi... is that you?"

Though Rav Shimon was puzzled and did not recognize the man, the soldier slowly removed his military cap and ordered his men to lower their weapons. He explained that years earlier, he had come to Telshe to take an entrance exam for the yeshivah where Rav Shimon had been a teacher. While walking between buildings, Rav Shimon had noticed a button was missing from the young man's coat. Despite the student's insistence that it didn't matter, Rav Shimon had brought him to his home so his wife could sew a new button onto the garment, noting that it was vital to be able to stay warm during the cold winter. That simple act of kindness stayed with the man through the years, even after he was drafted into the army and his life took a different direction. He told the frightened bachurim how fortunate they were to have such a rebbi before ordering his soldiers to leave. Moments later, they marched away, leaving the village untouched.

While we cannot control what becomes of any person we meet, we can control how we treat them; sometimes, a single quiet act of chesed can end up saving an entire world.

Based on A Touch Of Warmth By Rabbi Yechiel Spero. Reprinted With Permission from Table Talk.

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Good Shabbos!