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

PARSHAS MATTOS-MASEI – A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

From the Archives of Mishulchan Shlomo – Rabbi Caplan on the Parsha

When the tribes of Reuvain and Gad approached Moshe to allow them to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River, Moshe bristled, "Shall your brothers go out to battle [to conquer Eretz Yisrael proper] and you will remain here?" They reassured him saying, "We shall build pens for our flocks of sheep and cities for our children. We shall arm ourselves swiftly [and go out to battle] ahead of Bnai Yisrael until we have brought them to their place" (Bamidbar 32,6 &15).

While Moshe accepted their gracious offer, he chided them for having put their sheep before their children. Although it may appear to have been merely slip of the tongue, Rav Aharon Kotler asserts that it revealed their true priorities. They put their money first – even before their own children. Thus Chazal cite the *pasuk* (Mishlei 20,21), "The heart of the wise is on his right" – this refers to Moshe, "and the heart of the fool is on his left" – this refers to Bnai Gad and Bnai Reuvain who made the primary minor and the minor primary – for they cherished their money more than their children (Bamidbar Rabba 22,9).

The Medrash refers to the portion chosen by Bnai Gad and Bnai Reuvain as a "hasty inheritance". Due to their preoccupation with their wealth, they made a hasty and unfortunate choice. They forfeited their share in the primary part of Eretz Yisrael and they severed themselves from the rest of Bnai Yisrael by choosing to live on the other side of the Jordan River. Chazal tell us that the hasty choice of Bnai Gad and Bnai Reuvain was short lived for they were the first tribes to be exiled.

Our decisions regarding our parnassah and our wealth often reflect our priorities. What comes first: our commitment to Torah or our job? An opportunity for spiritual growth or the possibility of financial advancement? Our family – spouse, parents and children – or our clients and business associates?

We find a similar phenomenon with Novach who was from the tribe of Menashe. "And Novach went and captured Kenas and its suburbs and called it "Novach" after his name" (Bamidbar 32,42). Rashi cites the assertion of Rebbi Moshe Hadarshan that the name Novach did not stick.

Rav Shimon Schwab wonders why this occurred to the city named after Novach while Chavos Yair – the Villages of Yair – so named by Yair ben Menashe, did retain their name. He explains that Yair recognized that his possessions merely belong to him, but they don't define him. Therefore, he named them the Villages **of** Yair. Novach, on the other hand, saw his possessions as defining who he was, so he called the city "Novach." Since this was a misconception, it did not endure.

However, when it comes to Torah and Mitzvos, the opposite is true. The Torah that one learns becomes integrated into his personality and defines who he is. One who davens passionately can declare, as Dovid Hamelech did, "Ani Tefilla – I am prayer" (Tehillim 109,4). So too one who seeks and pursues peace can proclaim, "Ani Shalom" (Ibid 120,7). And a man who speaks only the truth is an Ish Ha'emes.

When we have our priorities in order, we are able to define ourselves not by the material acquisitions which we possess, but by who we truly are.

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

QUESTION: On שבת, may one open or close the door of an oven to remove food?

ANSWER: If one would bake with the door open like the picture on the side, then all problems would be solved. However, most prefer to leave oven doors closed when baking. The issue with opening an over door on שבת is, every oven has a thermostat that controls the fire. When an oven reaches the desired temperature, the fire shuts off. When cold air enters the oven and the temperature falls, the thermostat turns on the fire. Opening an oven door when the fire is temporarily off, will allow cold air in and cause the fire to go on. Closing an oven door while the fire is on will help the oven reach its desired temperature, which will then cause the fire to shut off. One is allowed to open the door while the fire is on since you are not causing the fire to go on. For the same reason, one may close the door if the fire is off. One may close the door approx. ¾ of the way, and when the fire eventually goes off on its own, the door may then be then closed. A simple עצה is to set a clock to turn off the oven before opening the door. If there is food in the oven that is not completely cooked, one may not close the door, because helping retain the heat in an oven facilitates faster cooking.

עי' שמירת שבת כהלכתה החדש סעי ל"ה ושמור וזכור חלק ב' בישול 14

THE EMPTY VORT

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Yaakov was walking through Yerushalayim one evening when a stranger approached him and said, “Could you please help me? There is a vort in this building, and it is mamash a nebach. Hardly anyone came. Both families are poor, and it would be a tremendous chesed if you could come in and help be mesameach the chassan and kallah.”

Yaakov hesitated. “I don’t know them. I was just walking down the street.” The man urged him, “It doesn’t make a difference. You’re a ben Torah. Just come in. They’ll feel so good.” Yaakov agreed, thinking, “Let’s do a mitzvah.”

Inside, the room was nearly empty and very quiet. The man told Yaakov, “Nu, start a niggun!” Yaakov began singing “Od Yishama,” and slowly the room came alive. Then the man urged him to sing another song, and the simchah grew warmer. Then the man said, “Nu, say a few words about the chassan.” Yaakov whispered, “I don’t know him at all.” But the man pushed him, “Just look at him. He looks like a nice ben Torah. You’ll do great.”

Finally, Yaakov got up and praised the chassan’s ehrlichkeit, menschlichkeit, hasmadah, and yiras Shamayim. In truth, he was making it up. He reasoned that since Chazal teach us to praise a kallah, perhaps it was permitted here too, in order to bring simchah. The kallah’s father was deeply moved by the speech, and when the vort ended, he gave Yaakov an envelope with 1,000 shekels inside.

About a year later, Yaakov heard that the couple had gotten divorced. It turned out that the chassan was the opposite of everything Yaakov had said. He lacked yiras Shamayim, had poor middos, and was not honest. Yaakov felt terrible. Had he been allowed to praise the chassan when he did not know if his words were true? And since the kallah’s father had given him the money because of that speech, did Yaakov have to return the 1,000 shekels? That was the question he brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? See Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim, page 554.

Regarding last week's question about the woman who wanted to convert, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky answered (Chashukei Chemed Nedarim page 539) that they should encourage her to continue to convert because even a non-Jew has an obligation not to break her oath.

THE $30,000 KIDDUSH HASHEM

Rav Shragie Freedman once told the following story: Over the past few years, Jackson, New Jersey, has seen many frum families looking for affordable homes near Lakewood. Like in many nearby towns, the sudden growth brought tension between some longtime residents and the new Jewish families moving in. Chezky was one of those new arrivals. He had been searching for a home for his family in a quiet, pleasant neighborhood, and when a house went up for sale on a beautiful block, he grabbed the opportunity. Before long, the deal was closed, and his family excitedly prepared to move in. But Chezky knew that not everyone in Jackson was happy about the changes taking place. He did not want to begin with suspicion or distance. He wanted to make a kiddush Hashem from the very first day. So on moving day, while boxes were still being carried inside, Chezky took several small platters of chocolates and began knocking on his neighbors’ doors. “Hi, I’m Chezky,” he said warmly. “We just moved in, and I wanted to introduce myself. I know you have lived here for many years, and we have no intention of disturbing your quality of life. If there is ever anything we do that bothers you, please let us know.” The neighbors were surprised. Some had expected friction. Instead, a new neighbor was standing there with chocolates, respect, and a genuine smile.

Chezky did not stop there. From time to time, he brought over another small treat. He exchanged greetings, asked how they were doing, and made friendly conversation. His wife did the same. Slowly, the walls came down. What could have been cold suspicion became warmth. Over time, Chezky and his wife developed real relationships of friendship and mutual respect with the families around them.

About a year later, Chezky heard that one of his neighbors, a man named John, was planning to sell his home. It was a large, attractive house in a prime location. Chezky immediately thought of his cousin Berel, who wanted to move to the neighborhood. Chezky knocked on John’s door. “I heard you may be selling your house,” he said. “I have a cousin who would love to live here. It would be so nice for our families to be near each other. Would you keep him in mind?” John smiled. “Of course. When we’re ready, I’ll let you know.” A month later, John called. “Because we like you so much,” he said, “I want to give your cousin the first chance to see the house before it goes on the market.” Berel came the next day. He loved the house and offered the full asking price. But almost right away, another offer came in, $30,000 higher. Berel assumed it was over. Who gives up $30,000? He was shocked when John’s agent called and told him that John had accepted his offer. Later, Chezky met John and could not hold back his question. “That was very kind of you,” Chezky said. “But why did you do it? You gave up a huge amount of money.” John shrugged peacefully. “I appreciate having you as a neighbor,” he said. “I wanted you to be comfortable and have your family nearby. Life is not all about money.”

John was right. Life is not all about money. For a Jew, life is about something much greater. It is about living in a way that brings honor to Hashem. A platter of chocolates, a warm greeting, a little thoughtfulness, and a sincere desire to respect another person can change a whole neighborhood. Reprinted With Permission from Table Talk.

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