



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת אמור תש"ע ♪ Parshas Emor 5770

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

This week's *parshah* concludes with the unfortunate episode of the *megadef* (blasphemer). A certain upstart becomes embroiled in a quarrel and ends up cursing and blaspheming the Holy Name of Hashem. This transgression is viewed so severely that the Torah mandates execution for its violation.

The preceding section spoke of the *lechem hapanim*, the special "show-bread" of the Sanctuary, which were replaced with new ones every Shabbos. The juxtaposition of these two sections helps explain what went awry.

THE ROOT OF BLASPHEMY

Apparently, it was the *megadef's* attitude towards this very institution that precipitated his downfall. Rashi (*Vayikra 24:10*) tells us that he mocked the mitzvah of *lechem hapanim*, scorning the fact that the loaves sat out for a full week (from Shabbos to Shabbos) before being distributed and consumed. "What is more fitting for a king?" he scorned. "To eat warm bread baked that day or bread that is several days old?"

According to the *Oznayim Latorah (ibid.)*, these words were rooted in a particular brand of hubris, which has unfortunately been prevalent throughout time. The *megadef's* issue, apparently, was that the mitzvah did not fit with his personal world-view. To his mind, the Torah's procedure for the *lechem hapanim* didn't seem "logical"; it would have made a lot more "sense" to eat it right away. Since the precept did not square with his personal sensibilities, he rejected and scorned it.

And we see where this path led once he embarked upon it. Eventually, he did not stop at even cursing the Name, and his end was swift and severe.

The *Oznayim Latorah* is not suggesting, of course, that one should not strive to understand the Torah and its precepts; on the contrary, such an endeavor is worthy and encouraged. The issue arises when one is unable to uncover an immediate solution to whatever legitimate questions may have arisen; how does he respond at that point? The *megadef's* downfall sprang from the mistaken attitude that his intellect reigned supreme; if it couldn't make sense to him, then – he concluded – it must be wrong. Instead, he could have recognized that – insofar as intellectual grasp is concerned – a man is not an angel, and so his level of comprehension is necessarily limited (especially regarding profound, spiritual matters).

We find a similar sentiment expressed by the Mishnah in *Megillah (4:9)*, where certain prayer-formulations are discouraged:

הַזוֹמֵר ... עַל קֶן צְפוּרַת יַגִּיעוּי רַחֲמֵיךָ ... מְשַׁתְּקִין אוֹתוֹ.
"One who states (as a form of prayer and praise), 'Your Mercy extends to the nest of a bird,' is silenced."

The Mishnah speaks of an individual who, in his moment of inspiration, expresses his praise over the mitzvah of *shiluach hakan*, the prohibition against collecting the mother bird along with her eggs. The composer of this hymn perceived that the underlying basis of this mitzvah was a demonstration of Hashem's Mercy, as He was looking out for the welfare of his creatures. Apparently, such a notion is a gross error, as the Mishnah calls for him to desist from such an assessment.

Where exactly is this fellow mistaken? Of course, it is true that Hashem does conduct His world with abundant mercy and oversees His creations. The error of the aforementioned prayer composer was that

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he saw these concerns as the impetus for Hashem's commandment. As Rashi explains (*Berachos 33b*), the true underlying principle of all of Hashem's *mitzvos* is the mere fact that they are exactly that – a *mitzvah* (commandment). The guiding factor for our mitzvah observance is our subservience to Hashem's Authority, regardless of whether or not we have fully comprehended the rationale of all of His directives.

CLEAR THINKERS

The esteemed sage R' Chaim Soloveitchik, scion of the venerated Brisker “dynasty” of Torah scholarship, once spoke of the *weltanschauung* (world-view) of his father, the Beis Halevi. He illustrated with a story heard from his mother concerning a certain unique grocery store of her youth.

Upon entering this store, one soon sensed that something was amiss. For example, one looking to purchase eggs would notice that – contrary to established practice – none of the cartons contained a *dozen* eggs. Instead, the egg cartons contained the curious amount of seven eggs each.

The same situation applied to the other items in the store: apples could not be purchased singly, but only in groups of three; all the milk bottles were only three-quarters full; and so on and so forth.

The other peculiarity of this establishment was the answer one received upon inquiring about the prices. When asked, “How much are the apples?” the proprietor gave a halting, one-word answer: “*Dr-dr-dr-drei* (three).” “How much do the olives cost?” “*Dr-dr-dr-drei*.” After all of this, the first-time customer was left scratching his head.

That is, until he learned of the store's “secret.” Apparently, the proprietor had one serious drawback: he was unable to speak. Only one word had he been able to learn and master: *Dr-dr-dr-drei* (three).

Like anybody else, this individual needed to earn a living, so he opened a store. But, since his vocabulary was limited to a single number, the business was arranged according to certain specifications: anything sold there had to be priced at exactly **three**

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kopechkes.

And so, to accommodate this limitation, the items in the store had to be packaged in such a way that they would all cost three *kopechkes*. A dozen eggs would go over the price limit, so their number had to be curtailed to fit a volume equal to the allotted three *kopechkes*. The same with the milk, the apples, and the rest.

So it was, R' Chaim concluded, with the Beis Halevi. Except that his word wasn't “*drei*”; it was “Torah.” Whatever he did, said, or thought had to fit with this prescription. What could not be reconciled with this special term – what did not meet the standards of “Torah” – was to be regarded with the utmost caution.

This could be the lesson of the *megadef*. His downfall resulted from the fact that he sought to reconcile the Torah with his own pre-conceived notions. He should have adopted, instead, the approach of the Beis Halevi, who subjugated *his* mind to the Torah's view – not the other way around.

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