THE TREACHERY OF THEFT

This section (Verses 5-10) includes various laws concerning one who steals and swears falsely, and one who steals from a convert who has no heirs. It also discusses the law that the Kohen must be given the gifts due him and that he may not take them himself. What do these things have in common and why are they referred to as “treachery”?

In Darash Moshe, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein notes that it is commonly thought that theft is a sin between man and his fellow man because the sinner is causing someone the pain of a loss of money. If so, one can rationalize that stealing from a wealthy man who won’t miss the money is not really wrong, nor would it be wrong to take something from the estate of a convert who will die with no heirs. Further, a Kohen could say that since the owner of some produce must give trumah to some Kohen anyway, why not take it himself? All the owner is losing is the benefit of being able to decide to which Kohen to give the trumah, but he is not incurring any monetary loss. Therefore, the Torah puts these three laws together to emphasize that even if, in fact, the one who is victimized by the theft doesn’t feel the loss, the thief has violated the trust of Hashem Who provides everyone with his needs in a permissible fashion without having to resort to stealing. One should recognize that his actual is acquired in a manner which demonstrates the blessing showered upon him by Hashem. This is a lesson that must be inculcated from youth.

A beginning Gemara teacher once asked Rav Moshe why youngsters begin learning Gemara with the perek dealing with lost objects rather than something more familiar, such as the laws of brachos. Rav Feinstein answered that it is important to imprint upon young children that one must be extremely careful how one treats someone else’s money.

ONE AT A TIME

The Gemara (Sotah 8a) presents the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah that from the fact that the Kohen shall “administer an oath to her”, we learn that the procedure of testing a sotah can only be done with one woman at a time. If two women are in need of having their cases resolved, we must finish with one before starting with the other so that the attitude of one is not affected by the other’s conduct. Rashi explains that if the first woman being challenged is adamant or obstinate, she may refuse to confess to any wrongdoing. This may, in fact, be due to her actually being innocent. The second woman, who may be guilty, might be influenced as she sees the first woman refuse to confess. She may mistakenly insist on her own innocence as well, rather than confess and save her own life.

This scenario teaches us a lesson which can be applied in another case as well. Two Jews came to a beis din for a ruling. As a result of the proceedings, it was determined that each had to take an oath, one of them requiring a Torah-legislated oath, while the
other was to take a rabbinic-level oath. The question was then presented. Should these oaths be administered together, or one after the other? And if they were to be one after the other, the question was then posed as to which oath should come first?

Rabbi Yaakov Reisher, the author of the responsa Shvus Yaakov, claimed that this Gemara in Sotah was relevant to that question. The rule is that if two people are being judged and they both will have to endure similar ordeals, we cannot have one of them exposed to how the other one deals with that challenge. After all, the one may be either stubborn or legitimately innocent, and therefore prepared to stand behind his convictions. In the case of the oaths, we do not want the first person to take his oath, and then have the second person feel pressured to take an oath as well, possibly in vain, which he might have otherwise decided not to take. Therefore, the correct manner in which to deal with the situation is to administer the oaths separately.

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A SELF-IMPOSED SEPARATION

Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 376) explains that the nazir was commanded not to defile himself even for his father or mother, and, needless to say, for other relatives. Yet, an ordinary Kohen, who was also sanctified, can defile himself for them. It would seem that the reason is that the sanctity of the Kohen attaches to him automatically. He did not consent to it, and it did not come about through any conscious choice on his part. Rather, from birth, from the womb, he was sanctified by virtue of his tribe, all of whom are holy. In his behavior toward his close relatives he is, therefore, just like any other person in the world, for there is no essential difference between a Kohen and the rest of the people, except that there are times when he serves at the House of God. But at times he will also dwell in his quarters and will be happy with his loved ones, and for an occasion of rejoicing and feasting he will call his good friends and his relatives. Therefore, his heart will grow warm towards them and they towards him as well. For this reason he was permitted to defile himself for them when they die.

However, if a man has vowed to be a nazir to Hashem, then during all the days that he is a nazir he is consecrated to Hashem. The Torah states about him (BeMidbar 6:7), “because his separation to God is upon his head”. He is not to become defiled through worldly cravings and is not to be found in any house of feasting or a banquet of friends, for his separation from wine affirms about him that he has determined to practice abstinence before Hashem and to repair the ways of his spirit, leaving aside the pleasures of the body. Then, having set his whole heart and all his thoughts on the good of his precious spirit, and having cast off the needs of his self and his flesh, why should he desire the company of his companions and friends any more, except for a mitzvah?

There is no doubt that as the nazir’s spirit is raised to a higher level, the pleasure of the body, with all that concerns it, becomes insignificant. Then all the more so will he not go after the company of other persons, whether they are near or far, and he will find pleasure in nothing except in the consecrated service to which he has become attached and to which it constantly looks. Therefore, because of his great holiness, his exalted level, and his separation from his brothers, the Torah restrains the nazir from becoming defiled for them, as would be the rule for a Kohen Gadol.

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THE BLESSINGS OF THE KOHEN

“Master of the universe, we have done what You have decreed upon us, now may You also do as You have promised us.” - From the prayer following the Priestly Blessing

This particular expression mentioned by the Kohanim seems to be unusual. Why do they refer to the mitzvah of blessing the people as “a decree”? They should simply state that they have done that which was “commanded to them to do”.

In Sefer Binyan Shlomo, Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen of Vilna notes how in translating the words (BeMidbar 19:2) "حسب ח威慑", Onkelos writes: “This is the decree of the Torah.” Accordingly, any mitzvah of the Torah which is in the realm of being a statute, a הַמִּצְוָה, for which we do not understand the rationale, is called a “decree”. The Gemara regularly uses this type of terminology in referring to a law for which there is no reasoning other than its being declared so by scriptual
The greatest Torah scholar, or prince, or pious and righteous God-fearing man is still dependent upon the Kohen in order to receive the priestly blessing, even if the Kohen is an ignorant simpleton. Unless the Kohen is otherwise disqualified from delivering the blessing, his acting as an intermediary is essential in the process of directing the blessing even upon the most prestigious and dignified of the nation.

This mitzvah is a statute, and its process leaves us with a lack of understanding. The Kohanim indeed are precise in their declaring this mitzvah to be “a decree”, for it is most certainly a קה.

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AN ATTITUDE OF CONTENTMENT

Rav Avira explains the following, sometimes in the name of Rabbi Ami and sometimes in the name of Rabbi Assi: The ministering angels said before Hashem, “Is it not written in Your Torah that You do not favor anyone nor do you take bribes? Yet You show favor to the Jewish people, as it is written, ‘God will show favor to you.’” Hashem assured the angels, “Should I not favor the Jews? I wrote in the Torah, ‘And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless God your Lord’, and they are so strict that they say Bircas HaMazon even after eating bread in the amount of an olive or an egg!” -- Gemara Brachos 20b

Why did Hashem answer the angels by pointing out this mitzvah in particular? What is especially significant about the fact that Jews say Bircas HaMazon even without having eaten a satisfying meal? And why should this cause them to be blessed with peace?

In Ozna'im LaTorah, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin explains that one of the primary causes of jealousy and strife in the world is the feeling that one lacks what he needs. Many wars have been fought over national economic interests. It is very easy for one to see others who have more than he does and to feel that the imbalance of wealth is unfair and must be rectified. However, if he would restructure his needs according to the dictates of Pirkei Avos (4:1), “Who is rich? - the one who is happy with his lot”, the jealousy and strife would disappear. One who can make do with what he has avoids conflict, and even on a national level, the need to make war would no longer be felt.

We know that Hashem rewards a person מייק גרדי - measure for measure. Though the Torah only requires a Jew to thank Hashem for what he ate if he ate to his satisfaction, the Jew has taken it upon himself to say Bircas HaMazon even after eating the minimal meal of an olive's bulk of bread (יה). This indicates that a person feels blessed even for a small amount rather than deprived. Such a person seeks to avoid the feeling of want which leads to jealousy and conflict. Therefore, Hashem answered the angels that such a people who go out of their way to be happy with what they have deserve an extra special blessing of tranquility and peace. Those who seek peace are rewarded with peace.

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ASHES AND DUST

And it was on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. On the second, the [red] cow was burned. On the third, they sprinkled the first sprinkling, and on the seventh, they shaved. -- Rashi

In the Gemara (Sotah 17a), Rava tells us that it was in the merit of Avraham Avinu having said “I am but dust and ashes” (Bereshis 18:27) that his descendants earned two special mitzvos. These two mitzvos are the ashes of the red cow and the dust of the sotah.

We should note that the precise wording of Avraham Avinu mentions the word “dust” before the word “ashes”. Accordingly, we would expect the two mitzvos which correspond to these words to be mentioned respectively, with the dust of sotah to be presented before the ashes of the red cow. However, Rava reverses the order. Why does he mention the mitzvah which utilizes ashes before the one which features dust?

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu Rabinowitz notes that the commentary of Rashi on our verse can be used as a key to answering our inquiry. Beginning with the second day of Nisan, the day after the opening of the Mishkan, the mitzvah of the red cow proclamation, as it calls such a ruling to be a "קְרִיָּה קְרִיָּה".
could already be performed. The “sprinkling towards Meeting” (BeMidbar 19:4) could already be fulfilled. The unfaithful wife was not told to the Jews until after the counting of the nation, as Ramban explains (see his commentary to 5:6), and this tally was conducted only a month later, beginning on the first of Iyar that year (see BeMidbar 1:1-2).

Accordingly, the mitzvah of the red cow was commanded first, and it was actually done first, at the beginning of the month of Nisan, whereas the law concerning a sotah was only given a month later, at the beginning of Iyar. This is why Rava mentioned the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, which uses the ashes of the cow, before sotah, which uses the dust and dirt, which is spread across the waters before the sotah is given to drink from them.

Halachic Corner

A brachah over a candle is recited on Motzai Shabbos during Havdallah because it was then that fire was first brought forth. Although Hashem decided to create fire on Erev Shabbos, it was not actually produced until Motzai Shabbos, when He gave Adam the idea of rubbing two stones together. By this action, Adam was able to produce the first fire, and he recited a brachah over it. It was on Motzai Shabbos as well that Hashem sent a pillar of fire to provide light for Adam and to guard him from evil. When Adam saw this pillar of fire, he rejoiced and stretched out his hands toward the light of the fire and recited the brachah "ברוך אתה ה' שיבחר תורא".

It is preferable to use a torch, a multi-wicked candle, so that a significant amount of light is produced. A torch is created by the joining of the flames of two or more wicks. Therefore, two single-wicked candles may constitute a torch if they are held at an angle to each other, thus forming a single flame. This can even be done with two matches. If a torch is not available, the brachah may be recited over a single flame.

A fire that was lit on Shabbos by a Jew or a non-Jew under forbidden circumstances may not be used for Havdallah except in a case where it was lit to aid someone in mortal danger.

Halachic Corner is dedicated by Benyomin Freeman in memory of his father Gedalia Freeman. May his memory be for a blessing.

Questions for Thought and Study

1. Why does the Torah use the term "אשה לארח" ("from male to female") when describing a person with tzora’as? Why not use the term "אשה לארח" ("a man or a woman")? See Malbim 5:3
2. Why does the Torah use the term "איש ואשה" ("a man or a woman") when describing someone who misuses שמן ("consecrated items")? Why not use the term "אשה" ("mankind" – which is usually the term for all genders)? See Ramban 5:2
3. According to Rashi, "אלהים" is a promise that your possessions will be blessed, while "שם" is that Hashem will guard you. Why is the blessing of possessions before the blessing of personal protection? See Ohr HaChaim 6:24
4. Where in the Bircas Kohanim is there an allusion that we must greet everyone (even non-Jews) first in a peaceful way? See Ba’al HaTurim 6:26
5. What was unusual about "אהלו ימים" ("their offerings") that the Torah describes Moshe as listening to the "voice" (" palavra") of Hashem that was speaking to him? Wasn’t he listening to Hashem? See Ohr HaChaim 7:89

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- By Gedalia Freeman - Hebrew Theological College wishing mazal tov to Avi & Aliza Kleinman on the birth of a baby boy; and to HTC Board of Regents member Martin Sambor on the birth of a great-grandson, Meir Dovid, born to Binyamin & Nava Sambor.
- Gourmet Torah at Shallots Bistro is not meeting in the restaurant, so we are bringing Torah to you. Please join Rabbi Yaakov Sussman over Zoom on Thursday, June 11, at 12:30 PM. Topic: “The Seven Books of the Torah”. Zoom ID: 99921240863 or call in +1 312-626-6799. Zoom ID: 99921240863.
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Congratulations to the teachers who participated in the EPIC Mentoring Program this year sponsored by the Associated Talmud Torahs and AFTA in conjunction with National Louis University: Joan Dachs Bais Yaakov - Mrs. Miriam Ullman; Lubavitch Girls High School - Mrs. Sheina Goldberg, Mrs. Raizel Hershkovitch, Yeshivas Tiferes Tzvi - Rabbi Shlomo Alexander, Rabbi Pinchus Eliyahu Wechsler. Yasher koach on your commitment to professional growth!

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By Rabbi Sidney & Sharon Pick in honor of the upcoming graduation of their son Jacob (aka Yisrael Zev) from Hillel Torah. We are very proud of you and wish you all the best in your future academic endeavors.

By Larry & Evelyn Yellin in memory of her father, Philip Goldberg, on the occasion of his yahrtzeit on 19 Sivan.

Sivan 19 is the 20th yahrtzeit of Mrs. Sarah Myers, ויה, whose gentle, loving spirit, dignity and grace uplifted all who knew her. May her memory and that of our dear father and grandfather, Louis Myers, ויה, continue to inspire us. With love, Michael & Bonnie, Shulamit, Shlomo, Tzeona, Kalman, Arvoa, Yechezkel, Avraham, Rutie, David, and their "kinderlach".

By the Feder and Rubinoff families in loving memory of their father and grandfather, Louis Feder, וביה, on the occasion of his 15th yahrtzeit on 15 Sivan. May his memory be for a blessing. (K.I.N.S., Chesed L’Avraham)

In loving memory of our beloved father and opa, Herbert Nussbaum, ויה, on the occasion of his twentieth yahrtzeit on 12 Sivan. - Steve & Ava Nussbaum and family; Jerry & Bobbie Nussbaum and family, and Mike & Suzy Nussbaum and family.

In loving memory of our mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, והיה, on her yahrtzeit on 20 Sivan. We miss you. - The Sheinfeld-Rimel-Chico-Elitzur-Siboni families.

Likutei Peshatim is endowed by Les & Ethel Sutker in loving memory of Max and Mary Sutker and Louis and Lillian Klein, ויה. May their memory be for a blessing.

Answers:
1. This is to teach that an adult with tzora’as is to be treated as a minor regarding the status of impurity.
2. It is more unusual for a woman to rob, so one might think a woman is not punished for misusing consecrated items. The term "טבש ע"זק" (Eisav) indicates that both genders are punished equally.
3. Ohr HaChaim gives three explanations. First, Hashem is promising increased protection, as the increase in wealth warrants. Secondly, the blessing of wealth will be so great that Bnei Yisrael will need more protection from those who are envious of Bnei Yisrael. Thirdly, Hashem will protect Bnei Yisrael from the haughtiness that usually occurs with the blessings of great wealth.
4. The word הילוי ("peace") is numerically equal to טבש ע"זק (Eisav).
5. One explanation is that these “offerings” were actually the wagons that the ויהא in the Mishkan donated to transport various items for the Mishkan. Another explanation is that the “offerings” were all the items listed further (bowls, basins, ladles, etc.) that were what filled the wagons.
6. When Hashem speaks, an angel is created that speaks to the person who hears it. No prophet actually hears Hashem directly, but they hear the “voice” (i.e. the angel) that is created by Hashem’s speech.

Prepared by Rabbi Ben-Zion Rand, Editor, and Mrs. Naomi Samber, Managing Editor
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