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OUR ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH TORAH

by *Rabbi Yechiel Bresler*

As the Jews settle in the desert at the edge of Har Sinai, Hashem calls out to Moshe Rabbeinu and tells him to relay to the Jewish people, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. And now, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemot 19:4-6). Why does the Torah need to add the words "And now"? Are they not superfluous? Rashi (19:5 s.v. VeAtah) explains that Hashem is trying to convey to the Jewish people that if they make an absolute commitment to keeping His Torah now, the observance of Torah and Mitzvot will become increasingly sweet from this point on, as "Col Hatchalot Kashot," "All beginnings are difficult." Thus, even though the Torah may seem like a difficult lifestyle with many restrictions, Hashem assures us that with a firm commitment to its observance, Torah, along with our relationship with G-D, will become increasingly sweet.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe points out that this is what we ask for every morning in Birchat HaTorah. In the second Berachah, "VeHa'arev Na," we ask G-D to make the Torah sweet in our mouth as well as in the mouths of our children. Why is it necessary to make such a request? Rav Wolbe explains that a life of Torah is a commitment to discovering the "Ratzon Hashem," "will of G-D." The commitment cannot be based purely upon the premise that it is a sweet lifestyle, for if it is, we put ourselves at risk of relinquishing our commitment at times when we are challenged. Rather, we commit to the

Torah because that is the will of G-D. We submit ourselves to the authority and request of The Master of the Universe, and throughout our journey, we pray to G-D to "make it sweet." Our commitment is not contingent upon the fact that it is sweet, but once we are committed, we beg and plea for it to be a sweet journey.

Indeed, this is the message of the Mishnah in the fifth chapter of Avot: "Any love contingent upon a fleeting thing—when the thing passes, the love passes. However, love that is not contingent upon a passing thing—the love will last forever" (Pirkei Avot 5:16). As is true with any relationship, if our relationship with G-D is dependent upon a specific thing, the love, and commitment, is fleeting. However, if we love G-D because we are intrinsically bound as one, the love and commitment will be everlasting.

This is what the Torah adds with the words "and now." Before the Jewish people can receive the Torah, it is necessary to commit to the lifestyle of serving Hashem, to accept the Torah with whatever it entails. This is precisely what occurs. Moshe tells this to the Jewish People who then respond, "Whatever Hashem says, we shall do" (Shemot 19:8). This is the unwavering commitment to fulfilling the desire of G-D no matter what happens, which makes the Jewish people deserving of the Torah. One who makes such a commitment is the subject of Hashem's assurance that "from this point on, it will be sweet for you." We daven that we should all merit to see this blessing fulfilled and that the Torah should be sweet in the mouth of each Jew for generations to come.

AVODAH ZARAH ... REALLY?

by *Tani Greengart ('18)*

The Aseret HaDibrot are the fundamental building blocks of Judaism, ten integral commandments that define the basic tenets of our religion. Some of the Dibrot are difficult to understand (especially "Lo Tachmod," conventionally translated as "do not covet"). The first two Dibrot, though, seem fairly straightforward. The first commandment is to know that Hashem is the one and only God, and the second is not to worship idols (Shemot 20:2-6).

But maybe it is *too* straightforward. How is the second commandment unique from the first? If Hashem is the only

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God, does it not go without saying that idols, animals, and stars are *not* God? Why is this a separate commandment?

Compounding this problem is the fact that when we read the Torah, there truly is no difference between commandments one and two. The Ba'al Keri'ah reads seamlessly from one to another without even pausing.

A better understanding of the prohibition of Avodah Zarah (worshipping foreign gods) can be attained by analyzing Moshe's warning to Bnei Yisrael in Sefer Devarim: "*VeNishmartem Me'od LeNafshoteichem Ki Lo Re'item Col Temunah BeYom Dibeir Hashem Aleichem BeChoreiv Mitoch HaEish, Pen Tashchitum VaAsitem Lachem Pesel Temunat Col Semel,*" "Be very careful for your souls, for you did not see any image on the day Hashem spoke to you at Choreiv from the fire, lest you become corrupt and make an engraved image of any form" (Devarim 4:15-16).

Moshe Rabbeinu says that Bnei Yisrael may be drawn to idols not necessarily because they want to replace God but rather because they want to *see* Him better. God has no physical form, which makes it very hard for Bnei Yisrael to relate to Him. Moshe worries that they will ascribe Godliness to non-Godly physical objects, like the Eigel HaZahav, because they can comprehend the existence of a golden calf much more easily than the existence of an intangible being Who is omniscient, omnipotent and exists independently of space and time.

The message of the second commandment is that we are forbidden to worship God through any physical intermediaries. We may only worship him directly.

Perhaps this explains the Gemara (Makkot 24a) which states that out of the 613 Mitzvot, only two are spoken by Hashem directly to Am Yisrael: the first two commandments of the Aseret HaDibrot. Why does God choose these two particular Mitzvot to deliver Himself, as opposed to any of the other 611 Mitzvot, which are taught by Moshe Rabbeinu? Perhaps He sees fit to deliver these two Dibrot Himself because the prohibition against worshipping intermediaries to God cannot be delivered by a middleman, even one as great as Moshe Rabbeinu.

The first and second commandments are closely intertwined because someone who worships a physical object, thinking it is the one and only God, has violated both the first and second commandments. But each commandment is unique; a person can assign meaning

to idols even while fully believing that Hashem is God.

But this calls to mind another question: how do these Dibrot apply today?

Surely there are some people who still worship statues or other physical objects, but they make up a minority of the world's population. The majority of people, especially in the Western world, believe in nearly the same God we do or believe in no God at all.

How is the second commandment relevant in an age and culture where worship of foreign gods is exceedingly rare?

Perhaps the answer is that Avodah Zarah refers to *any* attempt to ascribe meaning to meaningless things, not just to false gods. Secular culture believes that people can find meaning in their lives by attributing meaning to anything they want—money, material possessions, beautiful sunsets, professional sports, or anything else. YouTuber and secular philosopher C.G.P. Grey explained it well, "A sunset doesn't need meaning to be enjoyed; the enjoyment is the meaning" (C.G.P. Grey, "Q&A With Grey: Meme Edition").

But religious Jews disagree—we believe that the only true meaning of life comes from the tasks God has assigned us. That is what the second commandment teaches us.

This is not to say that we cannot enjoy sports and material wealth; just it was perfectly fine for the Jews of three millennia ago to enjoy and appreciate the sun's light, warmth, and beautiful colors as long as they did not worship the sun, we can enjoy and appreciate physical pleasures as long as we acknowledge that their only meaning—if they have any meaning at all—comes from the Torah.

The lesson of the second commandment is that true fulfillment comes only from the incomprehensible, intangible God, a lesson that is just as relevant today as it was at Har Sinai.

MANAGING A DOUBLE HALACHIC DISASTER IN THE KITCHEN

by *Rabbi Chaim Jachter*

Oh no! A congregant at Congregation Shaarei Orah, the Sephardic Congregation of Teaneck, used a meat spoon to stir burning hot cheese mixed with noodles in a pot! What to do? Of course, the first response is to call the rabbi.

The Status of the Cheese and Noodles

Invariably, the rabbi's first question will be whether the meat spoon was used with meat in the past twenty four hours. If the spoon was not used with meat within the past twenty four hours it is a "Notein Ta'am Lifgam," or "Giving off a bad

taste” situation: Chazal determined that after twenty four hours, the food particles absorbed in a utensil become rancid and the taste they omit does not render the food into which it falls as forbidden (Avodah Zarah 75b-76a).

Moreover, Tosafot (Avodah Zarah 38b s.v. Ee Mishum) present Rashi, Rabbeinu Tam and the Ri as all agreeing (which is, to say the least, not the usual situation) that this rule applies even if one is uncertain whether the utensil was used within the past 24 hours. The reason is that a S’feik Sefeika (double doubt) applies in such a case. One Safeik is that perhaps the utensil was not used within the past 24 hours. The second doubt is that even if the utensil was used within 24 hours, perhaps the mixture of the absorbed material and the food currently cooked is Lifgam, not a good taste.

Thus in our case, if the meat spoon was either certainly not used in the past 24 hours or even just possibly not used within the 24 hours preceding its insertion in the hot cheese dish, the Notein Ta’am Lifgam rule applies and the cheese and noodles are not rendered non-kosher.

The Status of the Spoon

The spoon nonetheless must be kashered since it has absorbed both meat and milk particles, as mandated in the aforementioned Gemara in Avodah Zarah:

The Torah forbids only [food cooked] in a pot used within the past twenty four hours (Ben Yomo), since it is not Notein Ta’am Lifgam. After 24 hours, it is not initially (Lechatchilah) permitted to be used for cooking [an item of the “opposite gender”], lest one confuse an Eino Ben Yomo utensil with a Ben Yomo utensil.

Disaster Strikes Again!

The spoon would thus be set aside until a minimum of 24 hours had passed (until it became Eino Ben Yomo) and would be immersed in an Eino Ben Yomo pot brimming with boiling hot water. As is the custom, the newly kashered utensil is then immediately placed into cold water.

However, disaster struck again, and before the kashering could take place, the spoon became mixed up with the rest of the spoons of the house. The rabbi was called again! Must all of the household spoons be kashered? After all, there were not sixty kosher spoons to nullify (Mevateil) the spoon that needed to be kashered to render it “Bateil BeShishim,” nullification by ratio of sixty to one.

When Non-Kosher Keilim Become Mixed with Kosher Keilim

In the case of the spoon, there is still hope. The requirement of a sixty-to-one ratio to nullify a forbidden item applies only to a mixture referred to as “Lach BeLach” (lit.

“wet in wet”), when both the items thoroughly mix. However, in the situation of “Yaveish BeYaveish” (lit. “dry in dry”), where identical items are not thoroughly mixed but the forbidden item is not identifiable, only a Rov (majority) of permitted items is needed to nullify the forbidden item. Thus, since the mixture of the forbidden spoon with the other spoons is a Yaveish BeYaveish situation, the spoon should be Bateil BeRov.

Davar Sheyeish Lo Matirin

Not so fast, however! The rules of Bitul do not apply in a situation of a Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin. A Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin is an item which will become permissible at a later point. For example, if a Muktzeh spoon becomes mixed with a number of non-Muktzeh spoons on Shabbat or Yom Tov, the spoon is not rendered permissible by virtue of it being Bateil BeRov because the spoon itself is not forbidden to be moved and has a time when it is permissible; after Shabbat or Yom Tov the spoon can be moved, and thus, the rules of Bitul and Rov do not apply to the Muktzeh spoon. Accordingly, the spoon in our case should not be Bateil BeRov, since the entire mixture of spoons can be kashered!

Let us spend a moment explaining the logic behind the rabbinic rule of Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin. There is no doubt that on a Torah level, the forbidden item is permitted if it is Bateil BeRov. However, Chazal forbade the mixture if it is a Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin. The simplest explanation for this rule is articulated by Rashi (Beitzah 3b s.v. Afilu BeElef): why should we rely on the leniency when there is an option to avoid the need to rely upon it?

The Ran (Nedarim 52a s.v. VeKashya Lehu) presents an elegant but intricate explanation of this Halachah. He notes the well-known dispute between Rabi Yehudah and the Rabbanan as to whether two like items, “Min BeMino,” one of which is forbidden and one of which is permissible, can ever be nullified (Chullin 98b). Rabi Yehudah argues that Min BeMino can never be nullified. His proof is from the fact that on Yom Kippur, the blood of the Sa’ir (goat) and blood of the Par (bull) is mixed and poured together on the Mizbei’ach. The blood of the Par is far more voluminous than the blood of the Sa’ir, yet the blood of the Sa’ir retains its identity despite its being Bateil BeRov.

The Rabbanan disagree and respond that when a forbidden item mixes with permissible items,

conceptually speaking, it is a Min BeSheEino Mino mixture, a mixture of two different items. The fact that one item is permitted and the other item is forbidden renders the two items as fundamentally different even though they are physically identical. For Issurim, there would never be a case of Min BeMino.

Therefore, argues the Ran, when there is a forbidden item that has the possibility of being permissible at a later point in time, it is fundamentally not a forbidden item but rather a permitted item. Thus, a Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin that mixes with permissible items is regarded as a mixture of Min BeMino even according to the Rabbanan, who agree with Rabi Yehudah on this point as a Chumrah due to the fact that there is nothing intrinsic to separate the object from a permissible object and it extremely close to a situation of Min BeMino.

An Exception to the Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin Rule

The spoon in our case seems to be forbidden due to its status as a Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin. Nonetheless, the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Dei'ah 102:3, citing the Rashba) rules that the Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin principle does not apply in a case where kashering is required due to the expenditure that is necessary to kasher the spoons. The Pri Chadash (Y.D. 102:8) and Chochmat Adam (53:23) explain that this situation is not regarded as a Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin since Tirchah (considerable effort) would be needed to kasher the utensils.

The Shach notes that the Maharil disagrees with this ruling, arguing that Davar SheYeish Lo Matirin applies even when Tirchah and a small expenditure is involved. His proof is from Bava Metzia 53a, which states that a mixture of normal food and Ma'aseir Sheini (second tithe, which is forbidden to be eaten outside of Jerusalem) is not nullified since it can be brought to Yerushalayim to be consumed, where travel expenses are certainly a Tirchah.

The Shach makes a compromise between the Rashba and Maharil and limits the lenient ruling to when the forbidden utensil is Eino Ben Yomo and forbidden only rabbinically. The Chochmat Adam (ad. loc.) rules in accordance with the Shach. Hacham Ovadia Yosef (Halichot Olam 7:87) also prefers the approach of the Shach, despite Rav Yosef's usual strong tendency to hew carefully to the rulings of Rav Yosef Karo. Thus in our case, we would wait 24 hours from the time the spoon was placed in the hot cheese, and we may rely on its being nullified in the kosher spoons in which it became mixed.

A Stringency from Rav Soloveitchik

We are not out of the woods yet. Rav Hershel Schachter cites Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, who ruled that the Shulchan Aruch's ruling applies only to a situation when kashering

utensils involves difficulty. This was the situation in the pre-modern world when obtaining water was not as simple as turning on a faucet. However, argues Rav Soloveitchik, since obtaining water in modern conditions is easy, the Rashba's lenient ruling no longer applies.

I mentioned this ruling to Rav Menachem Genack, the CEO of OU Kosher and a leading student of Rav Soloveitchik, who reacted with surprise. He noted that Tirchah is still involved in Kashering even in the modern-day context. Indeed, the contemporary (and quite stringent) commentary on Yoreh Dei'ah, the Badei HaShulchan, does not cite any authority who agrees with this ruling of Rav Soloveitchik. Thus, I ruled that the spoons were all permitted after waiting 24 hours from the time the spoon was placed in burning hot cheese.

Conclusion

We Jews love Hashem and His Torah, and therefore, we make every effort to investigate that we are properly observing His beautiful laws. This thorough investigation and discussion is not viewed by us as a burden but as a labor of love, toiling in the vineyard of Hashem!

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