



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE SOFT-HEARTED THIEF

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

In this week's Parsha, Matos Masei, the Torah discusses how the Shevatim, (tribes) divided the land of Eretz Yisrael. The Torah says, "one prince from each tribe will be chosen to acquire land for their tribe." Our Sages in Kidushin 42a teach that this means the courts will appoint an apotropus, an administrator, on behalf of the needs of orphans.

This leads us to the following story that happened in Eretz Yisrael:

There was a woman named Ilana, who had recently been widowed. She was left with two children, an older daughter and a young son. They were a poor family and struggled to make ends meet. Their financial situation was further strained by the impending wedding of Ilana's daughter, for which they could barely save.

Ilana made great sacrifices, slowly but surely saving money for the wedding. She kept all the savings in an envelope, protected



REMEMBER THE PAST TO SUPPORT THE FUTURE

The Malbim in his commentary on Tehillim 77 depicts the state of Klal Yisroel in their difficult trials of golus, as a wounded person who is slowly dying and feels that death is close by. In his final moments the dying man's entire life races across his consciousness. He remembers how HaShem had always been with him and never let him falter. From when he was enslaved in Egypt to the crossing of the Sea. He remembers how HaShem expressed His love to him when he followed HaShem into the desert in complete trust. As he remembers how HaShem placed His Own Honor in him and the hopes and destiny that HaShem has for him, he realizes that he is not going to die. Although his current condition appears hopeless with no future at all, nevertheless, upon his consideration of all that occurred to him and all the love HaShem invested in him he knows he will survive.

There were many prophecies that were spoken to our people in the times of the prophets. However only those prophecies that were meant for perpetuity were the ones that were written down. Therefore as we read this Shabbos the prophecies of the impending doom that was to befall our people by Yirmiyahu, it has relevance to us today, 2500 years later. What is that relevance? What can we gain from his warnings?

The first answer is that we must learn why the destruction of our Temple and State occurred in order to be able to correct those faults. There might be yet another answer why we need to receive these prophecies during this period of mourning.

and treasured.

One fateful night, a masked robber broke into their home. Somehow, he deduced where the cash was hidden. He crept to that spot, found the envelope, and stealthily slid it into his pocket, preparing to leave.

As he began his exit, he turned to find a seven-year-old boy staring directly at him. This was Ilana's brother. The boy stared at the thief and confidently spoke, "I see you stealing the money for my sister's wedding. You should know that my mother is a poor widow and we live in desperate poverty. If you take this money, you're going to break my sister's heart and my mother's heart. Can you live with that?"

His innocent yet potent words managed to penetrate the thief's heart. Feeling a pang of guilt, he apologized and returned the stolen money to the boy.

The thief then made his way to the door, but before leaving, he turned around. He pulled out a thick wad of cash from his pocket and handed it to the boy, saying, "Here is some more money for your sister's wedding. I wish to participate in this mitzvah of Hachnasas Kalla, helping a poor orphan get married."

The following morning, the young boy showed his mother the returned envelope and the extra money. Overjoyed, Ilana now had enough money for the wedding. But she was left with a conundrum: could she keep this money? It was, after all, given to them by a thief and most likely stolen. Was it permitted to use this potentially stolen money for the wedding? Or should they not keep the money and donate it to a public charity instead, washing their hands of it? What do you think?

See Upryo Matok Shemos Page 307.

and hope. When we listen to the doom of the prophets and remember that those words were meant for us, thousands of years later, we know that Yirmiyahu anticipated that we would still be here to read these verses and take them to heart.

In spite of all the reasons that would justify despair and certainly for two thousand years of this condition we nevertheless continue to exist and continue to thrive.

Perhaps we read Yirmiyahu's verses of doom to encourage us as they tell us of his belief and trust that we will survive our darkest moments.

As we look out over today's golus landscape and see the challenges that face our children we might wonder how they will navigate their avodas HaShem and their continuity. It is to address this concern that we read these prophecies.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind

MITZVA MEME



*Hashem can only do for me
what He can do through me*

We have traveled through so many excruciating periods in our golus. So many times in our golus the spark of hope grew so dark. One needs only to think back to less than a century ago. Were we not exactly like that person whom the Malbim parallels to the dying man. Before World War II the proportions of young people running away from their Torah heritage to the ism's of the day were astronomical. Judaism in America had no future either and the very few communities in our Land were struggling greatly. Even after the war ended, what could anyone hope for? It was a period of intense despair. Today we can see hundreds of thousands of students filling the thousands of Yeshivos and Bais Yaakov's. But who, back then, would have the imagination and belief that this would happen?

Perhaps the reason we read those prophecies of doom in this period of mourning is for us to draw encouragement



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

BIRDS OF BALTIMORE: THE SPARROW

Let's continue with our study of the fascinating Birds of Baltimore. There is a bird that is so generic-looking, small, and simple, that you probably never pay attention to it. It is the Sparrow. This small bird typically measures around 6.3 inches in length. Females are pale brown and grey, while males have brighter black, white, and brown markings. Females are usually slightly smaller than males. But despite their small and unremarkable appearance, these small birds have much to offer and teach us about Hashem's amazing world.

First off, their color is actually a gift. Their brown plumage camouflages them in their surroundings (even in urban environments), making them harder to spot.

Don't underestimate them because of their small size. They can be quite feisty. Despite their size, sparrows are very territorial. Males will defend their nesting territory vigorously, often engaging in fierce battles with other males.

And don't ignore them because they look plain. They adore humans and choose to live near them. Few birds are happier in the company of man than the house sparrow, and for much of the year, it is rare to find them far from human habitations. In fact, they avoid woodlands, grasslands, polar regions, and hot, dry deserts far from human development. Sparrows cannot be found in forests or deserts, unlike other birds. They thrive by living near humans. They prefer being in close association with human settlements, including urban and rural areas. In fact, because of its close connection to humans, it has become the most widely distributed wild bird on the planet. They can be found all over the world, except for Antarctica.

The house sparrow originated in the Middle East, but it spread, along with agriculture, to most of Eurasia and parts of North Africa. Since the mid-19th century, it has reached most of the world, chiefly due to deliberate introductions, but also through natural and shipborne dispersal.

An example of how the sparrow can be introduced to a new area is how the house sparrow was brought to North America. Only 200 years ago, there were no house sparrows on the entire continent of North America. Today, it is estimated that there are over 150 million. How did this occur? The House Sparrow was introduced from England to North America in Brooklyn, NY during the fall of 1851. Birds from England were released in New York City in 1851, intended to control the ravages of the linden moth. From there, it spread. Now, in 2023, in North America, the house sparrow is found from the Northwest Territories of Canada to southern Panama, and it is one of the most abundant birds on the American continent.

Well adapted to living around humans, it frequently lives and even breeds indoors, especially in factories, and warehouses. It has been recorded breeding in an English coal mine 2,100 ft below ground. It will also fly very high for food, even feeding on the Empire State Building's observation deck at night. It reaches its greatest densities in urban centers, but its reproductive success is greater in suburbs, where insects are more abundant. On a larger scale, it is most abundant in wheat-growing areas such as the Midwestern United States.

Sparrow nests are most frequently built in the eaves and other crevices of houses, or in nest boxes. Sometimes they make nests on top of street lights and neon signs, because they appreciate the warmth.

If they can't build a nest in human structures, they utilize holes in cliffs and banks, and tree hollows. A sparrow sometimes uses

the nests of other birds. It usually uses deserted nests, though sometimes it usurps active ones by driving away or killing the occupants.

These little guys are smart (their brains are larger in proportion to their body than other birds) and know how to navigate human environments. Sparrows have been seen performing complex tasks to obtain food. They've figured out how to open automatic doors to enter supermarkets; when home feeders are empty, sparrows will tap the window or door glass periodically until they are refilled.

Why is that sparrow flying away with a cigarette? Don't worry; it's not going to smoke it; it's going to build a nest. Sparrows in cities use cigarette butts to protect their nests. The nicotine helps drive away parasitic mites. When they can find an unsmoked cigarette, those butts work better than the smoked ones. This is because they have more nicotine to trap the mites.

While humans help the sparrows a great deal, they also help us. They benefit humans by eating insect pests. Their proximity to us has also greatly benefited humans' advancements in science. Due to its abundance, ease to raise, and general lack of fear towards humans, the house sparrow has proved to be an excellent model organism for many avian biological studies. To date, there have been almost 5,000 scientific papers published with the house sparrow as the study species.

The house sparrow is a very social bird. It is gregarious during all seasons when feeding, often forming flocks with other species of birds. House sparrows also engage in social activities such as dust or water bathing and "social singing", in which birds call together in bushes. The house sparrow feeds mostly on the ground, but it flocks in trees and bushes. At feeding stations and nests, female house sparrows are dominant despite their smaller size, and they can fight over males in the breeding season.

What is dust bathing? The birds will first scratch a hole in the ground with their feet, then lie in it and fling dirt or sand over their bodies with flicks of their wings. They will also bathe in water or in snow. Water bathing is similar to dust bathing, with the sparrow standing in shallow water and flicking water over its back with its wings, also ducking its head under the water. Both activities are social, with up to a hundred birds participating at once, and are followed by preening and sometimes group singing. Because of this, in Japan, the sparrow is a symbol of loyalty owing to its friendly nature and ability to live in groups.

The house sparrow is monogamous, and typically mates for life. Interestingly, many sparrows do not find a nest and a mate, and instead may serve as helpers around the nest for mated pairs. If they help in this role, this can increase the chances of being chosen to replace a lost mate.

Though they are not water birds, house sparrows can swim when they need to for survival and have been observed swimming underwater when threatened.

Sparrows have a very high metabolism and need to eat constantly. They can consume up to half of their body weight in food each day. Sparrows can eat over 800 different types of food. This adaptability makes them some of the most versatile birds in the world. Their diet can include seeds, insects, fruits, and even garbage.

RESTOCKING THE SODA MACHINE

A talmid chacham once came to speak with Rav Dovid Feinstein, and he was immediately confronted by this unexpected sight. Reb Dovid Feinstein was restocking the soda machine in the yeshivah's front hallway. This was a common occurrence, but the visitor was shocked to see it.

The visitor was stunned and tried to do the task, but Reb Dovid didn't let him. "It is my mitzvah," he said simply, not understanding why the other person would try to take it.

"But it is not appropriate for the Rosh Yeshiva!" the visitor argued.

"What's your mekor, your source, that this is called 'eino l'fi k'vodo'?" Reb Dovid asked. "It brings in money for Torah, so to me it's a great kavod."

(From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, Published By Artscroll Mesorah and Reprinted With Their Permission)



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question of the smashed camera, Brooklyn Posek Rav Moshe Yosef Weiner answered that neither of the people in the story would be obligated in Beis Din court to pay for the camera. However, it would be a midas chasidus, a matter of piety for either of them, or all of them, to pay for it.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of Abraham Adler
Hachaver Abraham ben Tzvi z'l
Beloved grandfather

He was a proud man who fought for the Germans in World War I and after Kristalnacht was able to live a life of great humility without diminishing his pride.

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