

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE PARKING LOT

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha, Bamidbar, makes a reference to the prohibition of stealing from the Beis Hamikdash. (Bamidbar 4, 20, and see Sanhedrin 81b)

This leads us to the following true story.

Yosef lived in Israel and owned a parking lot in a busy area of town. Every day he would work from 9-5 managing his parking lot. He would sit in the front of the parking lot collecting money as people came in to park their cars.

After 5 PM he would close the lot and go home. He would eat dinner and then spend the rest of the night learning Torah.

He maintained this schedule for years. Manning his parking lot during the day and close it and then learn at night.

Meir became aware of Yosef's consistent schedule. He realized that the parking lot was not being used all night and Yosef was never there at night. He took the initiative and decided that he would not let the parking lot go to waste.

Without asking the owner, he set up his own sign at the entrance to Yosef's parking lot and began to attract cars to park there in the even-



POETRY; MUCH MORE THAN WHAT MEETS THE EYE

With Shavuot upon us just after Shabbos, I thought it would be worth considering why we celebrate two days Yom Tov when the Torah only designates one day. The reason for our celebrating two days of Pesach and Succos is because our Sages wanted to maintain the custom of s'feika d'yoma which our ancestors kept when they were exiled in Bavel.

HaShem instructed the Jewish court to establish the new month on the last day of the preceding month. Being that our calendar is based on the lunar cycle which is 29 days and 12 hours every month will be either 29 days or 30 days. This means the new month will start on the 30th day from the beginning of the previous month or on the 31st day. Every month the Court decided whether to begin the new month on the 30th or the 31st. Behold! HaShem endowed His people with the authority to decide when the holidays should occur.

This meant that the Jews living in the diaspora, in Bavel and other places would not know which day was chosen until much later in the month. They therefore observed two days of Pesach and two days of Succos. Regarding the holiday of Shavuot, however, there was never a problem. Shavuot occurs on the 50th day of the Omer. The Omer count began on the 16th day following the beginning of Nissan. All the Jews living in Bavel already knew on which day Nissan began even before Nissan ended. Therefore there was never a s'feika d'yoma on Shavuot. Why then do we celebrate two days?

Today we have a prearranged calendar and the Jews throughout the world know when Yom Tov will begin. Why did our Sages see fit to commemorate the s'feika d'yoma that our ancestors observed?

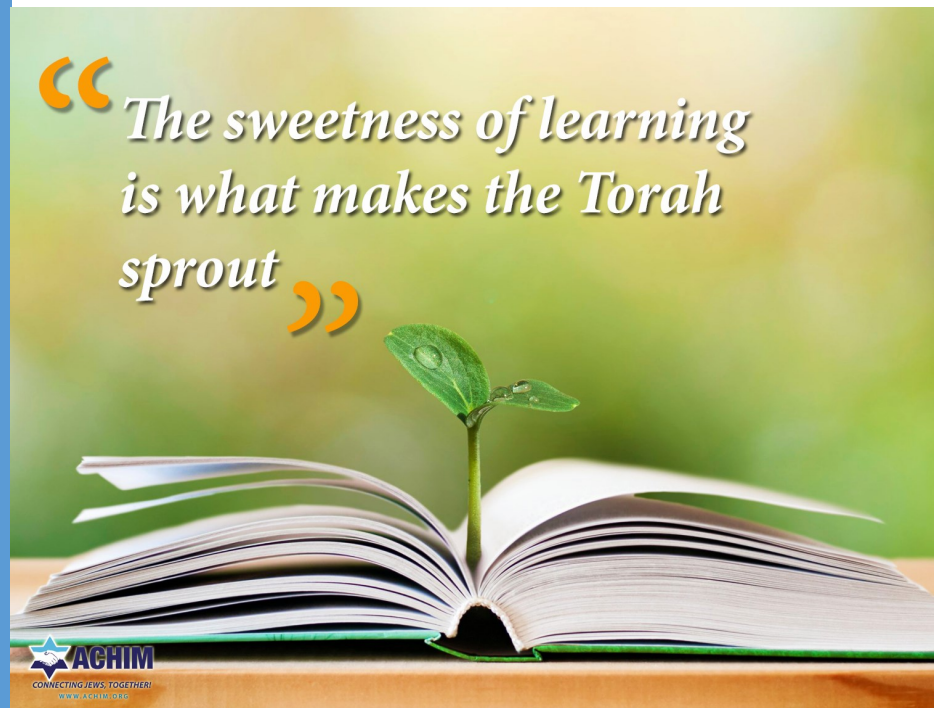
ing. Meir collected the money as the cars pulled in. Meir rationalized to himself that he wasn't taking anything away from Yosef, and the customers were gaining by getting access to parking spots. In his mind it was a win - win. He gained, the customers gained and Yosef did not lose anything.

One day Yosef needed to attend a wedding. The wedding was close to his parking lot so he decided that he would park in his own lot. As he pulled up to his lot, a man asked for payment to enter the lot. It was Meir. "Excuse me, what are you doing in this parking lot?" Yosef demanded. Meir said, "What do you mean, I've been managing this lot for a while. "Well please leave, this is my parking lot. And not only that, I want you to make sure you pay me every penny that you collected for charging people to park in my lot."

Meir suddenly realized that he was talking to the owner of the lot. He tried to muster as much charm as he was able and began to speak to Yosef. "You are right, this is your lot. But I didn't take any money from you. It was not being used at all and it was totally vacant. I was providing a service to the people of the neighborhood. This is an example of 'ze nehene ve ze lo chaser', where one person benefits and the other does not lose. I don't owe you anything as the money collected would not have gone to you.

As Meir spoke a small crowd gathered around the car. One of the bystanders, a man named Eliezer, spoke up. I think another stakeholder needs to get the money back. Every single person who paid money to park here should get a refund, because they should not have been charged. The money should not go back to the owner of the lot, or the squatter, but to all the people who paid money to this man.

What do you think? Who gets the money? Yosef, the owner of the lot, Meir the one who charged people at night, or the customers?



Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that our Sages wanted to leave a permanent mark on our calendar that would demonstrate the incredible authority with which HaShem endowed His people.

To fully appreciate the holiday of Shavuot we must properly appreciate the gift HaShem gave us. While it would be correct to say that the Torah is the instruction manual of life. It is HaShem's directions and guidance for living life. Nevertheless, HaShem gave us much more than those instructions.

Let us compare Torah to a poem written by the most masterful poet. The genius of a poet is that he knows how to craft his words to carry multiple implications and connotations. The better the poet, the more messages will lie within his poem. The Torah HaShem gave us has many secrets tucked into every word and every letter and every nuance. If one adheres to the guidelines and principles of interpretation there are infinite messages to be learnt from HaShem's Torah.

When HaShem gave us His Torah, He told us that from now on, the Torah is ours. Yes, He is the Author but now it is ours. The way we understand and interpret the Torah that becomes the reality of His Word. It is almost as if He subjected His Will to our understanding. Our Sages teach us that the insights and understandings that every student of Torah will discover increases the very body of Torah.

The incredible joy that the country girl has when the king decides to marry her is that she is elevated to a level that she could never dream of before. By HaShem giving us His Torah, He elevated us to a level that no mortal could ever dream of; HaShem committed the fate of His Torah to the understanding of His people.

This is similar to the authority with which He endowed the Jewish court to establish the calendar. Even though the implications of adjusting the calendar effect when HaShem will judge the world and when HaShem will grant atonement, He nevertheless left that decision up to our Court to decide when that day should be.

This is the joy of Shavuot. Perhaps our Sages applied s'feika d'yoma to Shavuot to underscore that incredible joy. By observing an extra day, one more than the Torah prescribed, our Sages demonstrate the authority with which HaShem endowed His people.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

POPPY SEEDS

I'm sure you've had challah or a bagel with poppy seeds. You might have eaten hamentashen with poppy seeds. Have you ever thought about where those little black or blue seeds come from?

Poppy seeds have a fascinating connection to Judaism. In German and Yiddish, poppy seeds are called Mohn. Why are the seeds called Mohn? Some etymologists suggest that it comes from the description in the Torah of the Manna, the miraculous food that the Jews ate in the desert. The Torah writes in Shemos 16, 31 "And the house of Israel called the name Manna; and it was like a white seed and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." We will learn that poppy seeds have a special unearthly quality and that might be why poppy was nicknamed mohn.

Interestingly, mohnkuchen or mohntashen were dough pockets filled with Mohn. On Purim there is a minhag to eat seeds to remember the seeds that Esther ate in order to observe kosher. So for Purim, the mohn tashen were called hamentashen to also remember the miracle of Haman's destruction.

Let's explore together some of the fascinating qualities of poppy, and we might get a better appreciation as to why they called it Mohn.

A poppy is a flowering plant with colorful flowers. Poppies can be over 3 feet tall with flowers up to 6 inches across. Poppy flowers can have 4 or 6 petals.

When fully ripe, the poppy pod produces edible seeds. Poppy seeds can be black as well as white. Poppy seeds are rich in oil, carbohydrates, calcium and protein. Poppy oil is often used as cooking oil, salad dressing oil or in products such as margarine. Poppy oil can also be added to spices for cakes or breads. Poppy products are also used in different paints, varnishes and some cosmetics. Poppy is also used for production of dried latex.

Poppy seeds are rich in fiber, plant fats, and a various number of nutrients. Those nutrients include manganese, copper, calcium, magnesium, zinc, thiamine and iron. Poppy seeds are particularly rich in manganese, a trace element important for bone health and blood clotting. Poppy seed oil is especially rich in omega-6 and omega-9 fats which improve overall health and lower the risk of heart disease.

However, before the pod is ripe, the poppy pod is milked to extract the milky poppy latex which is used to make the narcotic drug opium. This contains powerful medicinal alkaloids such as morphine, heroin and codeine. This has been used since ancient times as an anal-

gesic and narcotic medicinal drug. It is used to create many of today's legal pharmaceutical painkillers like codine and other opioids. Users experience a euphoric rush, followed by relaxation and the relief of physical pain. The traditional, labor-intensive method of obtaining the opium from poppy is to scratch ("score") the immature seed pods (fruits) by hand; the latex leaks out and dries to a sticky yellowish residue that is later scraped off and dehydrated.

When was poppy first harvested and used as a pain reliever? It is believed that its origins come from the Sumerian people, who lived in the area of Ur Casdim approximately 3000 BCE. There, the first use of opium was recognized. They called the plant "hul gil", the plant of joy.

Ancient Egyptian doctors would have their patients eat poppy to relieve pain. Small jugs resembling poppy seed pods have been discovered with trace amounts of opium in Egypt, dated 1550-1292 BCE. The Sumerian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Indian, Minoan, Greek, Roman, Persian and Arab Empires all made widespread use of opium, which was the most potent form of pain relief then available. This allowed ancient surgeons to perform prolonged surgical procedures.

It takes about 3,300 poppy seeds to make up one gram, or 1.5 million seeds to make up a pound. In 2018, world production of poppy seeds was more than 76,240 tons, led by Turkey with 35% of the world total, followed by the Czech Republic and Spain as other major producers.

Harvesting the poppy for poppy seeds is actually in conflict with harvesting it for opium. This is because to harvest poppy seeds, they should be harvested when they are ripe, after the seed pod has dried. However, opium is harvested while the seed pods are green and the seeds have just begun to grow and their latex is abundant. Opium is produced by "milking" latex from the unripe fruits ("seed pods") rather than from the seeds.

Can you get high from eating poppy seeds today? Poppy seeds and oils are non-narcotic because when they are harvested about twenty days after the flower has opened, the morphine is no longer present.

Although you cannot get high from ripened and dried poppy seeds, nonetheless even the poppy seeds contain the opium alkaloids. This means that eating foods that contain poppy seeds can actually result in a positive result for opiates in a drug test.

LEARNING BY HEART DOES NOT COMPARE TO LEARNING FROM A SEFER

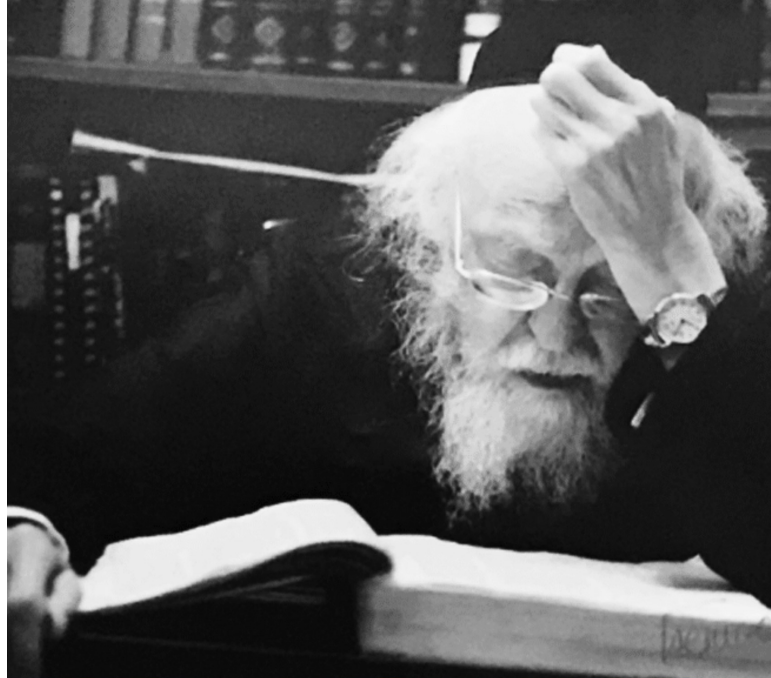
A great grandson of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv related the following story. Once, when it was his turn to spend the night with Rav Elyashiv, there was a major thunderstorm throughout Israel. Rav Elyashiv awoke at 2:20 a.m to learn but there was no light. Rav Elyashiv continued sitting in his place and learning as usual — saying the gemara, Rashi, Tosafos aloud in his pleasant melody, asking questions and answering, without pause. When the young man approached his great grandfather, Rav Elyashiv asked whether there was anything that could be done about the power. "I already tried everything," his great-grandson said. "We need an electrician to come." He lit some candles, and Rav Elyashiv directed him where to place them. Rav Elyashiv then asked his great-grandson to bring him a certain sefer. The young man searched for the sefer in the dark room but could not locate it. Rav Elyashiv himself got up and said, "It's possible to see in the dark, too." He went over to the bookshelves and immediately found the sefer he wanted. A short while later, after attempting unsuccessfully to learn by candlelight, he said, "It's possible to learn by heart, too." He then continued learning energetically and aloud by heart until daybreak.

On another occasion, on a long winter Friday night Rav Elyashiv awoke to learn but the electricity in his house blew, plunging the house into darkness. Without thinking twice, he took his large Gemara over to the window, and, holding it toward the streetlight, he continued to learn while standing for hours.

What was remarkable about this episode is not that Rav Elyashiv wouldn't give up his learning session due to a blackout, even though he was in his 90's at the time, but rather that he persisted in learning out of a Gemara even though he knew all of Shas by heart!

Rav Elyashiv would explain that learning by heart does not compare to learning from a sefer, and when one learns from a Gemara he delves deeper into the sugya. And for this seemingly minor difference, he exerted himself to stand by the window holding his Gemara for hours on end.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the pidyon haben, Rav Zilbertsien wrote that if the story was that the Kohen found out he was really a Yisrael, then it would be no question that he would have to return the money and all the firstborns would have to do it again. In this case, however, where he was a Kohen who was a challal, he was for sure not permitted to do it, but after the fact there is a question about what to do. In practice he said we should be stringent and the Kohen should return the money and they should each do the pidyon over again with a kosher Kohen.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the aliyah of the neshama of
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