

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



HOW MANY MA'ASERS

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion discusses the mitzvah to give tzedakah, charity (Vayikra 25,35). The halacha is that we are obligated to give at least a tenth of our income each year to charity. This is called maaser.

This leads us to the following story.

Ian was a non Jewish man who grew up in Nebraska. He joined the Marines because he enjoyed the structure and discipline of military life. After leaving the armed forces he realized that he gravitated to a structured and disciplined life. This led him on a spiritual quest which eventually led him to a process of Geirus, conversion. He began studying with a Rabbi to eventually become a Jew. The Geirus process took him more than three years. During the years before his geirus, Ian lived a religious life. He dressed like a religious Jew, davened three times a day, and kept nearly all of the mitzvos. He also gave maaser along with the rest of the mitzvos he observed.



THERE'S A LOT RIDING ON US

This week's Parsha, Behar, discusses the unfortunate situation where a Jew who faced by financial depression sells himself as a servant to a non-Jew. The duration of this arrangement lasts until Yovel at which time the servant goes free. This law applies when the non-Jew is subject to Jewish law. The mechanism by which he can be freed before Yovel is by someone paying his "owner" the cost of his freedom. This cost is established by the amount of money that was paid to the Jew at the beginning of the transaction minus the amount of time that has passed. The Torah underscores that it is important to pay the proper amount to the non-Jew for what he deserves.

Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that the Torah is teaching us how careful we must be not to abuse our power over this non-Jew even though he is subject to our rule. He then adds the following insight. Cheating the non-Jew creates a chillul HaShem that is far worse than if we would have cheated a fellow Jew.

When one Jew cheats a fellow Jew, the victim will hate the perpetrator and say all kinds of nasty things about him. Nevertheless, he will never say "Jews are a bunch of cheaters" or "that's what Jews are taught" and so on. He himself is a Jew and he does not cheat. However, when the victim is a non-Jew, his hatred will be directed to the Torah which is taught to every Jew and to HaShem Who the Jew represents. He therefore states that stealing from the non-Jew is a more serious offense than stealing from the Jew.

Rabbeinu Bechaya extends this notion to explain the special prayer Shlomo Hemelech asked from HaShem when he inaugurated the Bais HaMikdash. Shlomo requested HaShem to please answer the prayers of the non-Jew that is offered to Him from this place

MITZVA MEME

Finally the day arrived and shortly after Pesach he completed the Geirus process by going to the mikvah, getting a bris milah, and accepting to keep all the mitzvos. Ian was extremely gratified to have come so far.

Shortly after completing the geirus, Ian, now Yitzchak, had the following question.

He set aside and gave maaser every time he deposited his paycheck. His annual salary was \$90,000, and he planned to give \$9000 for maaser. So far that year he gave \$5000 for maaser. But did the maaser he gave when he was not yet Jewish count as a part of his annual maaser? Would he have to give just another \$4000 or perhaps another \$9000 to fulfill the mitzvah of maaser.

On one hand, he was the same person, and even as a non-Jew he still had a mitzvah to give tzedakah.

On the other hand, however, after his conversion he got a new neshama, a Jewish soul. Perhaps the money he gave before the conversion did not count towards his maaser obligation and he would have to give the 10 percent starting now. Perhaps he would have to give another \$9000.

This question was eventually brought to Rav Zilberstein.

What do you think? Does the charity given before his conversion count as his annual maaser?

See Chashukei Chemed Baba Basra page 78

If you have a true mitzvah dilemma that you would like to share, please email it to rabiweiner@gmail.com

“ I have witnessed the softening of the hardest of hearts by a simple smile ”



(the Temple) even if he does not deserve to be answered. Whereas, the prayers of the Jewish people that will be offered up to HaShem from this place should be answered in accordance to their merit.

Why does King Solomon want that the non-Jew's prayer should always get a positive response and for his fellow Jews he does not ask for this? Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that the non-Jew looks to HaShem as the benevolent Creator Who gives life and sustenance to every creature irrespective of their merits. Given this perspective, if the non-Jew's prayer will go unanswered, he will speak and think badly of HaShem and that would be a great chillul HaShem.

The Jew, on the other hand, has a different perspective. He has a personal relationship with HaShem. He knows that it is a relationship of growth. HaShem is his Teacher and his Guide to become a better person and a more Godly person. If something stressful happens to the Jew which brings him to pray for a better situation, he knows that

HaShem pays attention to everything he asks for. If HaShem refuses to give him his request, he understands that it is either because he is not deserving at this point or there is some other reason that is beyond him for which HaShem refused his request. Behold! Shlomo is concerned that the non-Jew will misappropriate HaShem's refusal and turn an angry note towards HaShem. Rabbeinu Bachaya considers this concern a chillul HaShem!

In today's climate, the non-religious Jew sees the Torah observant Jew as a representative of HaShem and the Torah which he studies. The concern Rabbeinu Bechaya has for the non-Jew applies today to the non-religious Jew as well. Using Rabbeinu Bechaya's insight, the responsibility for every Torah observant Jew becomes enormous. Even if no injustice was done, but it can be perceived as such, the concern for chillul HaShem is realized.

May HaShem grant us all the awareness of how much is riding on our conduct and give us the insight to deal in a manner in which produces only kiddush HaShem.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE DECOY SCORPIONFISH

Off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii, lives a rare fish called the *Iracundus signifer*. It is also known as the Decoy scorpionfish.

A dorsal fin is the fin at the top front of a fish. But the Decoy scorpionfish has a dorsal fin that looks like a small fish!

The fin is shaped like a fish head, with a dot where the eye should be.

The fin membrane is notched between the 1st and 2nd spine and resembles the mouth of a fish. The fin has the color of a fish, but the horizontal bottom of the fin is transparent, so it will not appear to be attached to the decoy fish below it.

When the decoy fish sees possible food swimming nearby, it goes through a special routine to attract it to draw near:

First, the decoy fish's dorsal fin goes up and displays the shape of a smaller fish.

Then immediately upon raising the lure to view, the fish stops its gill movements, and slows its breathing.

Next, the fin lure changes to a deep red color, and a small horizontal area at the base of that fin changes to a transparent see-through band.

While the decoy fish remains motionless, it now moves the decoy fin from side to side, and causes that slit (the "mouth") to open and shut!

This draws other fish near, who are curious to see that inviting small fish.

Then, suddenly, the decoy fish snaps its prey in one quick movement.

Finally, the the fin color fades away and the fin is folded down onto the back of the decoy fish.

How incredible are Your creations, HaShem!

HOW COULD WE DISAPPOINT THEM AND NOT COME?

Towards the end of Rav Yisroel Belsky's life, he suffered a ruptured esophagus. The doctors thought he would not make it. But miraculously Rav Belsky did recover and he lived for an additional four years. Rav Belsky's daughter, Mrs. Devorah Presby later observed, "Perhaps my father was granted four more years of life after his esophagus ruptured as a reward for the four brisos that he gave up for the sake of a ger."

Here's the backstory behind that comment.

Rav Belsky's beis din conducted the geirus of a young woman. This woman settled with her husband in the Philippines. The couple stayed in close touch with Rav Belsky. When this couple was planning their daughter's Bas Mitzvah, they called Rabbi and Rebbetzin Belsky to request that they fly to the Philippines to join them for this celebration.

Rav and Rebbetzin Belsky graciously agreed to go to the Philippines to attend the Bas Mitzvah.

A week before the Bas Mitzvah, Rav Belsky's daughter, Mrs. Devorah Presby gave birth to quadruplets — three boys and one girl — in Eretz Yisrael. The next day, Rabbi Eliyohu Belsky's wife gave birth to a boy in Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Belsky now had the opportunity to serve as mohel for four grandsons within a span of two days.

However, these simchos conflicted with the Bas Mitzvah in the Philippines for which he gave his word he would attend. A grand celebration had been planned and which could not be postponed.

Rebbetzin Belsky expressed the feelings of both her husband and herself. "The Torah says in more than one place that it is a mitzvah to love a ger. How could we disappoint them and not come? We already told them that we are coming!" And so Rav and Rebbetzin Belsky missed the brisos of four grandsons in order to attend this Bas Mitzvah.

On this, Mrs. Presby reflected, "Perhaps my father was granted four more years of life after his esophagus ruptured" as a reward for the four brisos that he gave up for the sake of a ger."

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THE ANSWER

Regarding the question about calling the nursing home to let them know that the Alzheimer's patient was there, Rav Zilberstein said that the cousin would not be allowed to call directly. The fact that the Jews were driving on Shabbos was not a problem because they were actually doing a mitzvah by driving. However, the cousin should have asked a non-Jew to make the call. He can do amira leakum, to prevent the other patients from getting less care.

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