

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE MAFTIR AUCTION

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha, Ha'azinu, has an allusion to the bracha we make before reading the Torah and getting an aliyah. The Torah says, "When I call the name of Hashem, I will bring greatness to our G-d" Devarim 32,3. Our Sages in Barchos 21a say that is an allusion to the mitzvah to make a bracha before learning Torah.

This leads us to the following fascinating true story. Chaim, who lived in Eretz Yisrael, was one of the leaders in a shul that would sell and auction off the aliyos every week. They would not sell the first three aliyos, of Kohen, Levi and shlishi.

One week Moshe told Chaim that he had a yahrzeit for his father. That same week, Shlomo, who was a Kohen, told Chaim that he had a yahrzeit for his grandfather.

Chaim knew that Moshe was struggling financially and could not afford a lot of money. Shlomo, on the other hand, was the richest person in the shul. Chaim, the shul leader, approached Shlomo on Shabbos and said as follows. "Shlomo, I understand that it's your grandfather's yahrzeit and that you would want the aliyah of Maftir. I also understand that if you get into a bidding war with Moshe or anyone for that matter, you will win. Shlomo, can you kindly let Moshe win the auction and let him buy maftir for his father's yahrzeit? Shlomo replied with a smirk, "You don't have to worry about it. Not a problem."



NOT JUST WHAT, BUT WHO

The single most important trait the Jew must have is hakaras hatov, appreciation, for the kindness that is bestowed on him. The Jewish people are a nation whose existence is not tied to a land but is tied to a relationship with HaShem. The cement that is used in building relationships is appreciation. Hence, both as a nation and as individuals the Jew must recognize the kindness that HaShem bestows upon us as a nation and upon us as individuals and reciprocate that kindness to the best of their ability.

When one receives kindness from another, the benefactor is owed appreciation and recognition for the kindness he showed to the recipient. Based on the type and amount of kindness will determine the level of appreciation that is owed. However, there is another factor in establishing the level of appreciation and that is who the benefactor is. If the benefactor is a peer the appreciation owed him will be greater than if it is from a subordinate. And if it is from a world famous celebrity the level will increase so much more so than from a peer.

Given this insight we can taste the fineness of sentence structure that the Torah employs in this week's Parsha. Consider the following nuance.

Moshe delivers the Shira, the Song, to his people. This is the Shira which is to be remembered and reviewed in every generation until the end of Jewish history. The Shira tells of the history and the destiny of our people; of our rise and of our fall and of our eventual return and how HaShem will bring the ultimate

Chaim felt assured that he had addressed the issue. Soon the auction began. When they came to auctioning off maftir, Moshe offered 50 shekels. Shlomo countered with 200. Moshe offered 250, and Shlomo countered with 800. Moshe offered 1000, and Shlomo countered with 3000 shekels. Moshe was unable to compete with that and with great dismay, backed out. Shlomo chuckled to himself. Moshe looked crestfallen, heartbroken and ashamed. Chaim, who thought he had an understanding with Shlomo, felt indignant. Why didn't Shlomo uphold his commitment?

Chaim, aroused with a sense of justice, decided to take action, but behind the scenes. His plan was to make sure that Shlomo got the aliyah of Kohen instead! In that shul there were only three Kohanim, and Shlomo was one of them.

When the shul took the Torah out and was about to begin the aliyos, Chaim called the other two kohanim and asked if he could talk to them outside. The two kohanim complied and they followed Chaim outside. Chaim spoke to them outside and meanwhile, the gabbai called up the Kohen for the first aliyah. The gabbai understood that Shlomo bought maftir but there was no other Kohen there, so he called up Shlomo for the first aliyah. Shlomo was surprised but took the aliyah because he was the only Kohen. When they got to maftir Shlomo started to walk up to get maftir. But then people in the crowd reminded him of the halacha that one cannot get two aliyos.

Because Shlomo was not able to go up, even though he won the auction, the gabbai called up Moshe, the second-place winner of the auction.

Moshe went up, and Shlomo chuckled to himself, with good humor, realizing that he was outsmarted.

So Chaim succeeded in righting what he saw as a wrong. But then he had the following realization. Because of his hidden intervention, the shul did not get the three thousand shekels that Shlomo offered. At the most, the shul would get 1000, because of Chaim's intervention. Although he thought he did the right thing, he caused the shul a loss of 2000 shekels.

Chaim wanted to know if he was required to pay the shul the difference for its loss.

He sent this question to Rav Zilberstein. First of all, did he act properly in his situation, and second of all, did he have an obligation to pay the difference to the shul?

What do you think?

See Upiryo Matok Shemos Page 303



justice to the world for its behavior throughout the passage of history.

The Shira is not merely the Song of our destiny but it provides us the guiding light of who we are and what our mission is. It lays down the expectations HaShem has for us and what we need to do to achieve those expectations.

The Shira opens with reprimanding her people for their arrogance towards HaShem she says "To HaShem! Is this how you reciprocate, you are arrogant and foolish... He is your Father, He established you as a people..."

Take note that she does not say "Is this how you reciprocate to HaShem..." but rather "To HaShem, is this..."

The distinction of this fine difference is on which point is

the Shira scolding her people. In the latter, her point of contention lies on the kindness you received; how can you not acknowledge the wondrous kindness that you received from HaShem. Thus the basis of our appreciation rests only on the kindness that was extended.

In the former the focus is on HaShem. To HaShem! Is this the way you reciprocate?! In other words, not only did you fail to recognize the very kindness but you did not consider Who was providing that kindness. The level of reciprocation is so much higher. We have almost no possible way to reciprocate properly when the benefactor is the Creator Himself. The One Who hung the 10^{24} stars in the heavens and the One Who pays attention to the entire world's ecosystem and so on, He cares so much and does so much for me and for us! Therefore, our turning away from HaShem instead of turning towards Him is a sin of tremendous gravity.

As we find ourselves in the period of the year when we are focused on the Greatness of HaShem may He help us keep that awareness through Succos and on through the rest of the year.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos and beautiful Yom Tov.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

MYRRH, MORR

One of the special services of the kohein gadol on Yom Kippur is the offering of the Ketores inside the Kodesh Hakodashim.

Let's look a bit deeper at some of the ingredients in the ketores. Morr, or Myrrh in English, is one of the ingredients of the ketores. The Gemara says that Mor is an allusion to Mordechai, which can be read as Mara Dachya. We also know that in the times of Achashverosh's beauty pageant, women would soak in the oil of Mor.

Myrrh is actually unique in that it is not a plant in itself, but rather a gum resin that is extracted from the sap of the Commiphora plant, also known as the torchwood. Torchwood is identifiable by its knotted trunk and white flowers. It is very spiny and will grow to about 13 feet high.

Frankincense, Levona, comes from a plant of a related family. Levonah is also a resin derived from the sap of a tree, the Boswellia tree. Its dried sap is whiter than Mor, and it is possible that the name levona means "the white one", in contrast to Mor.

Myrrh is a reddish-brown dried sap from a thorny tree. A steam distillation process is used to extract myrrh essential oil (shemem hamor), which is amber to brown in color and has an earthy scent.

Myrrh comes out of cuts in the bark of torchwood trees. When a wound on a tree penetrates through the bark and into the sapwood, the tree secretes a resin. Myrrh is harvested by repeatedly wounding the trees to bleed the gum, which is waxy and coagulates quickly. After the harvest, the gum becomes hard and glossy. Extracting the sap is a tenuous dance—you must injure the tree without killing it. If done properly, the wound will stimulate a process called "gummosis," which is exactly what it sounds like: the tree tries to gum up the damage, and you can carve off the resulting ooze for your own uses. Upon exposure to air, myrrh hardens slowly into globules and irregular lumps called tears, which are then collected from the trees.

The gum is yellowish and may be either clear or opaque. It darkens deeply as it ages, and white streaks emerge.

Myrrh is native to northeast Africa, (Somalia, Oman, Yemen, Eritrea, Ethiopia) and Saudi Arabia. Although Myrrh smells good, it tastes very bitter and that may be the origin of the word, Mor, from mar bitter.

The word Mor was imported into Greek and múron in Greek became a general term for perfume.

Myrrh resin has been used throughout history as a perfume, incense and medicine. Myrrh mixed with posca or wine was common across ancient cultures for general pleasure and as an analgesic, a pain reliever. Myrrh was commonly used in Traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine.

Ancient Egyptian women added myrrh to their makeup and used myrrh to embalm mummies. What is interesting is that the oils not only provide a nice scent but also slow decay. Scientists now know this is because the oils kill bacteria and other microbes that cause decay.

Additionally, in ancient times, myrrh incense was burned in places of worship to help purify the air and prevent the spread of contagious diseases, including those caused by bacteria. One recent study found that burning myrrh and frankincense incense reduced airborne bacterial counts by 68%. Preliminary animal research suggests that myrrh can directly kill bacteria, as well as stimulate the immune system to make more white blood cells, which also kill bacteria. In test-tube studies, myrrh oil has strong effects against several infectious bacteria, including some drug-resistant ones.

In the past, myrrh had been more valuable than gold. In the 1st century CE Arabia produced about 448 tons of myrrh each year. Both frankincense and myrrh were transported on the Incense Road From the Arabian Peninsula as far as India and China. But in modern commerce, it has greatly gone down in value. A 0.34 ounce bottle of frankincense oil costs \$12 on Amazon, while myrrh oil rings up at \$15. And the price of a similar amount of gold, you ask? You'd ring up a bill of about \$428 for a nugget of the same weight.

Today myrrh is used as a flavoring component in foods and beverages. In manufacturing, myrrh is used as a fragrance, in incense, and as a fixative in cosmetics. It is also used in embalming.

Myrrh has pain-relieving qualities and has been used as an analgesic for toothaches and can be used in liniment for bruises, aches, and sprains.

**"THE CUSTOM NOT TO EAT KITNIOS IS OF RABBINIC ORIGIN,
WHEREAS TO EAT WHAT IS OFFERED BY RAV CHAIM OZER IS KA-
VOD HATORAH, WHICH IS D'ORAISA"**

In 1940, the Brisker Rav went to Vilna and visited Rav Chaim Ozer Grodensky on Pesach. Those who accompanied the Brisker Rav that Pesach can testify about the tremendous sense of awe he felt in the presence of Rav Chaim Ozer.

Here is what happened. The Brisker Rav's family members noticed that the sugar sold in Vilna was different from the raw sugar they used to buy in Brisk, and the question came up whether the local sugar might have some vegetable oil mixed in during processing, thus raising a she'eilah of kitnios. The Brisker Rav therefore instructed his family to cook the sugar before Pesach in large quantities of water, such that the volume of their mixture would certainly be sixty times more than that of any oil that might be in the sugar; thus rendering any oil in the sugar halachically nullified before Pesach, allowing the sugar to be eaten during Pesach.

During that Pesach visit, the Brisker Rav was served a cup of tea, and Rav Chaim Ozer himself passed him a plate of sugar cubes. The Brisker Rav helped himself to one of the cubes, mixed it into his tea and drank, in honor of his host.

Immediately upon leaving the house, the Brisker Rav was seen spitting, trying to clean out his mouth and get any remnants of sugar out of his mouth. How did he explain his behavior to those who had noticed what had happened?

"The custom not to eat kitnios is a chumrah of rabbinic origin, whereas to eat what is offered by Rav Chaim Ozer is kavod hatorah, which is d'Oraisa (an obligation from the Torah)!"

When Rav Chaim Ozer offered him the sugar cubes, the Brisker Rav ate them out of kavod for him.

This story is all the more meaningful when we appreciate The Brisker Rav's life-long commitment to following every halachah to the letter and how he trembled over the smallest detail without giving the slightest thought to what others would say. He did this even in cases where a normal person would have rationalized and allowed himself to be lenient, as the concern was very remote.

And yet — kavod hatorah, is d'Oraisa!

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THE ANSWER

Regarding the question of the expired registration, Rav Zilberstein wrote that the owner of the car has to pay the fine.

The printing of this week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of Moshe and Leah Juravel on the occasion of their 80th yartzeit. They perished at the hands of the Nazis. May HaShem avenge their blood.

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