



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת פנחס תש"ע ❧ ❧ ❧ *Parshas Pinchas 5770*

STARVING FOR TORAH

In a real life occurrence, the Dubner Maggid demonstrated how one can make the most of a difficult situation.

The somewhat intricate incident is recorded by his disciple, R' Berish (*S'fas Hayeri'ah to Ohel Ya'akov, parshas Pinchas*). He relates it to the Medrash on this week's *parshah*, which comments on a verse from the section dealing with the daily offerings. While the Torah refers to this sacrifice as "*Korbani lachmi*" – My sacrifice, My bread – the Medrash is quick to point out that there is no such concept of eating and drinking in the Heavenly spheres. Concerning Moshe Rabbeinu, the Torah states that when he ascended Har Sinai to receive the Torah and remained there for forty days and nights, he neither ate nor drank.

"WHEN IN ROME..."

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia 86b*) utilizes this information to prove a point concerning the laws of *derech erez* (proper conduct). A person should attempt to conduct himself in the manner of his hosts – even if their ways differ from his own. We see this notion from Moshe Rabbeinu, who refrained from food and drink during his entire sojourn on the mountain. What led Moshe to adopt such a seemingly extreme measure? He did so in order to avoid behavior that was conspicuously different than his surroundings. The celestial angels do not eat or drink; so when Moshe was among them, he fasted, as well.

The Dubner Maggid was bothered by a question on this

particular topic. He felt that there was a seemingly more compelling way for the Gemara to prove its point, and wondered why it declined to do so. To appreciate this alternate proof, it is worthwhile to provide a brief background into the laws of oaths. The Mishnah in *Nedarim (2:1)* states:

שְׁבוּעָה שְׂאִינִי יָשֵׁן, שְׂאִינִי מְדַבֵּר, שְׂאִינִי מְהַלֵּךְ, אָסוּר.

"If one swears that he shall not sleep, or not speak, or not walk – (the oath is valid; hence) he is forbidden to engage in these activities (i.e., the oath is binding)."

The Gemara (*Nedarim 15a*) qualifies the statement concerning sleep: the aforementioned oath is only binding in reference to a certain limited time period (e.g., "I won't sleep for X amount of hours,"). However, if a person swears to refrain from sleeping for three consecutive days, his oath is automatically disqualified. The reason for this is that it is physically impossible for a human being to avoid sleeping for an extended time period. Someone who takes such an oath has uttered an oath in vain, but the oath itself is non-binding, so he can go back to sleep (but is punished with lashes).

This is what bothered the Dubner Maggid. We have seen that (under normal circumstances) a person cannot go without sleep for three days. This would have constituted the perfect proof that one must adopt the ways of his hosts: namely, from the fact that Moshe refrained from sleeping during his visit amongst the angels. True, refraining from eating is an extreme step – but refraining from sleep is an even starker example of adopting the customs of

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one's surroundings. Sleeping is much harder to avoid than eating; why not demonstrate the extent to which Moshe went to duplicate the angels' ways by pointing to his abstinence from sleep?

The answer came to the Dubner Maggid in a most unexpected way.

MIDNIGHT SNACK

One day, after a long journey, the Maggid arrived at his place of lodging. At this point, he was completely famished and fatigued. He asked his hosts if they could provide him with some food with which to stay his hunger.

“We’re terribly sorry,” they replied, “but we have nothing, not even a piece of bread.” Left with no other choice, the Maggid went to lie down and rest his weary body.

But the starving scholar could not fall asleep. It was then that he noticed some activity amongst his “generous hosts” (who thought he was sound asleep). Apparently, these poor, wanting people suddenly “found” a huge store of food and were in the midst of arranging a lavish feast for themselves!

Yet, instead of disappointment or anger, the Dubner Maggid was pleased; he realized that his question on the Gemara had just been answered.

The Gemara was inferring that one should emulate the ways of one’s compatriots from the fact that Moshe adopted the angel’s custom of refraining from food. Why didn’t the Gemara prove the same thing from the fact that he withdrew from sleeping? The answer is that the Gemara really is, in effect, deriving both – that he neither ate nor slept. That is, one can only state definitively that there was no eating, if (in addition) there was no sleeping, either.

In other words, based on his first-hand experience, the Maggid realized that it is possible for one party to engage in feasting while the other, (supposedly) fast asleep, is “blissfully” unaware.

So, why, in fact, did Moshe refrain from eating? He did so because the angels did not eat. Yet how was he so sure that the angels did not eat? Maybe they were snacking while he was sleeping? It must be, then – by virtue of the fact that Moshe curtailed his eating habits, confident that the angels conducted themselves likewise – that Moshe stayed awake the entire time! This way, he could have caught any “cheaters.”

Apparently, then, when the Gemara states that Moshe refrained from eating, it tells us – automatically – that he abstained from sleeping, as well.

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