



A Taste of Torah Not By Choice

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

One of the more enigmatic areas we encounter as we recount the story of the Exodus is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. After Pharaoh has consistently refused to set the Jewish People free, despite numerous miracles and plagues, G-d hardens Pharaoh's heart. That's right. No more free choice. From here on in, Pharaoh is a mere puppet, and G-d is pulling the strings. And while G-d always does, ultimately, pull the strings throughout all of Creation, there is one area he leaves to us mere mortals: the choice between good and evil. Yet, here, G-d relieves Pharaoh of the one thing in his power.

To be honest, there are a number of commentators who say that, in fact, Pharaoh still had the ability to choose to allow the Jewish People out of Egypt; the "hardening of the heart" referred to by the verse means that Pharaoh had a much harder time choosing to do the right thing. The reason G-d decided to severely hamper Pharaoh, they explain, is due to the plagues. G-d was administering some pretty serious arm-twisting, which would cause Pharaoh to be more inclined toward freeing the Jews. To restore the proper balance between the choice of good and evil, G-d ratcheted up Pharaoh's stubbornness in the face of the

suffering, ensuring that full free will was maintained.

The Rambam, though, understands that Pharaoh completely lost any free choice. The reason, he explains, is that G-d only waits so long for the wicked to repent. Usually, once time has run out, G-d takes the life of the individual. In certain unique cases, though, when G-d wants the world to take a lesson, G-d allows the wicked to live and endure the suffering created by the wrongdoings of a lifetime. Even though the wicked person has not expired, his entitlement to free choice has; at this point, everything he does wrong is held against him, for he is to blame for having reached such a sorry state. Such was the case with Pharaoh, as he was punished for his continued refusal to let the Jews out of Egypt, despite his lack of free choice.

Although losing one's free choice is highly unusual, we do need to take an important lesson from Pharaoh: our time to accomplish in this world is limited. And while G-d does not demand perfection overnight, he does expect us to invest the best effort we can towards that goal. A life spent saying "later" is a tragedy, because usually later never comes. It is our responsibility to seize the moment – every moment – and live it in the best way that we can.

Ask the Rabbi Passover the Peanuts

Carol & Barry Stein wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why, in the United States, at Pesach, is it OK to cook with peanut oil, but not to eat peanuts? We've tried

unsuccessfully to get an answer to this question for at least 25 years. Now, having harnessed the power of the Internet, we eagerly await your response.

Dear Debbie,

Stories For The Soul

To Catch a Thief

Rabbi Yehuda ben Besaira, one of the Tanaim, sages of the Mishna, had a non-Jewish neighbor. One day the neighbor boasted, "It is written in your Torah that no gentile or uncircumcised male shall eat of the korban pesach; yet I go every year to the Temple in Jerusalem, pretend to be a Jew, and eat the Pascal lamb."

Reb Yehuda was not flapped by this. "Have they given you the fatty tail?" he asked his neighbor. When the neighbor said, "No," Reb Yehuda continued, "You are missing the best part. Next time be sure to ask for it."

That Pesach, when it was time for the meat of the korban Pesach to be given out, the imposter got on line as usual. After receiving his portion, he asked to be given the fatty tail.

They were stunned by the request, "What did you ask for?"

"You heard me, I want the fatty tail. I know that's the best part and you've been holding out on me."

"Who told you that we should give you the fatty tail?"

"My neighbor, Rabbi Yehuda ben Besaira."

The sages were confused. Everyone knows the fatty tail is burned on the altar and is not eaten by anyone. They realized that Reb Yehuda was sending them a message. They investigated and discovered that the man was an imposter, and the travesty ended.

The sages sent Reb Yehuda a note saying, "Rabbi Yehuda ben Besaira, you live in Netzivin, yet your net is spread out over Jerusalem."

Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

The Kollel is on Pesach break. Classes will resume on April 23.

A DEEPER LOOK AT KORBANOS WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers and delve deeply into the weekly Parsha. Class is held on Tuesdays at Aish from 8-9 p.m. The class will resume after Pesach break, on April 24th. For information, contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855



HEART OF THE TORAH - AT AISH OR ANYWHERE

Join Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab and Rabbi Yechiel Erlanger to learn the Ten Commandments - the Heart of the Torah - in depth. This 14-part series will complete the in-depth study of the Ten Commandments just in time for the August 1st national and local Grand Siyum Hashas celebrations. Classes are held at Aish and broadcasted via gotomeeting.com. For more information, contact email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855-820



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS CLASS BEGINS AFTER PESACH

Join Mrs. Esti Schwab for an exciting new six-week series, United We Stand, Mondays 11:30 am-1:00 pm at the East Side Kosher Deli, beginning April 16th. The class will focus on creating and bettering our relationships with others. Each week will focus on an independent area of personal growth. For more info email esti@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Returning Lost Objects

The exemption for a distinguished individual applies only in a place where it is beneath his dignity to retrieve the item; if he finds it in an area where he will not be seen, and there is no issue of embarrassment, the obligation still

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

Continued from front
David Kaplan wrote:

Shalom, I have a question which as you can see concerns the 'laws' and traditions governing what one may eat during Passover. I cannot understand why Sephardic Jews are allowed to eat beans, legumes and rice on Passover, and Ashkenazic Jews are not. This is not the same as eating pork or milk and meat obviously. I really find this a difficult issue to come to terms with. Please help. Thanking you in anticipation.

Dear Carol and Barry Stein & David Kaplan,

Kitnios is the Hebrew word for all types of legumes, such as peanuts, peas and beans, and cereal grasses such as rice and corn.

According to the Torah, kitnios are permitted on Passover because kitnios are not considered chametz (leaven).

But kitnios are similar to chametz in that they swell when water is added, and people often use them as a flour substitute. Furthermore, kitnios are often stored together with grain, and sometimes a bit of grain gets mixed into the kitnios. For these reasons,

Ashkenazic Jews throughout the centuries have adopted the practice to refrain from kitnios during Passover.

Sephardic Jews, however, never adopted this practice. Therefore, they are allowed to eat kitnios, provided they check it to make sure there's no wheat mixed in. (For this reason, some Sephardic Jews also have the custom to refrain from rice, although they eat other types of kitniot.)

Now about peanut oil. Oil derived from kitniot no longer resembles chametz because it no longer swells when you add water. Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, zatzal, a former Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, cites an opinion that kitnios derivatives are therefore permitted. Many people in the United States follow this ruling and use kitnios-based oil on Passover. Many are strict, however, and use olive or walnut oil.

Sources:

Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 453:1

Ibid. Mishnah Berurah 6

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Yabia Omer 5:37:5

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