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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Bechukasai ✍️ Rabbi Moshe M. Willner

Soaring Higher

Tomatoes are red, and cucumbers are green because all that exists in the physical world is rooted in the spiritual. What we see as a tomato is merely a physical manifestation of its spiritual make up. The reason for the color and texture of any given fruit is a result of its place in the spiritual worlds.

With this we can understand an idea presented by Rabeinu Tam, in Sefer Hayashar where he proves that there is life after death. In creation there is a contrast in the posture of human beings and animals. Humans stand straight while animals are bent over towards the ground. The fact that animals are bent alludes to their destiny which is to return their soul to the earth. Humans, however, stand straight which symbolizes their souls yearning to ascend. This proves that after the demise of the body, the soul, unshackled will continue to soar eternally. The human body is rooted in a higher level of spirituality, and therefore its posture is erect. Of course, the ability to ascend depends on whether a person conducts himself in a befitting manner. Alas, one who acts like an animal loses the ability to ascend spiritually. Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mirrer Mashgiach, explains a verse in this weeks' parsha with the above idea. Hakadosh Baruch Hu describes our exodus from Egypt, "And I led you (out of Egypt) komimius- erect." Rashi explains this to mean B'koma Zekufa- erect in posture. Throughout our years in

bondage, we were unable to connect properly with our yearning soul. Through the exodus, not only were we released from physical labor, but we were now able to reunite with our souls. In fact, Unkelos defines komimius as "cherusa"- freedom. True freedom is freedom of the soul. This idea can be very encouraging! The default position of a Jew is to be directed upward into eternity. No matter how low one has descended, he can return to his natural tendency to soar upward by reconnecting with his spiritual essence. Further more, through living life with the awareness of our high level of kedusha- holiness, we will refrain from conduct unbefitting to someone of our stature.

Rabbi Willner learns full-time at the kollel.

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with
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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Ksiva and Mechika

Rabbi Shlomo Francis

Writing and erasing are both “avos melachos” (the thirty-nine primary labors that constitute the headings for whole categories of labors that are forbidden on Shabbos).

Any method of forming a letter or a word may be considered “Ksiva”, and any form of destroying an existing letter or word may be considered “Mochek”.

Midioraisa, something is only considered kesiva if the writing is permanent, however, midirabonon, one is liable even if the writing is temporary (i.e. writing in the sand or on a fogged window). Similarly, if one would erase a temporary letter or word he would only be liable midirabanon. Many library books have words stamped on the page edges. When such books are opened, the letters are broken, hence a question of mochaik arises. When the book is subsequently closed, the parts of the letters reunite and are reformed into complete letters, hence a question of kosaiv. The poskim disagree as to whether it is permitted to open such books. The Levush considers opening such a book a deoraisa form of mechika. He reasons that since the actual letters are permanent, opening the book would constitute mechika. However, the Taz and the Perishah disagree. The Perishah compares this to opening a door. Being that a door is meant to be opened and closed, opening it is not considered making a structural change in the house. Similarly, words stamped on page edges are written in a way that would be subject to temporary changes in the course of normal use. Causing such changes does not detract from the words original structure and is therefore not a transgression of the mechika prohibition. The Mishna Berura rules that initially one should refrain from using such a book, however, if there is no other book available without writing, one may rely on the lenient opinion.

If a page of a sefer is torn, it is questionable whether one may hold the torn segment next to the remaining portion of the page, thereby reuniting the torn words. The permissibility of such an act would depend on the legibility of the letters prior to their being “reunited”, and whether the page segment is partially or completely removed from the page. This is subject to debate among the poskim, and one should therefore ask a Rav before reuniting such a page. One may definitely close such a sefer without being concerned that a torn page may be “reunited” in the process.

Many food wrappers are inscribed with words which may be broken in the course of removing the wrapper. Care must be taken not to tear through any letters. In instances where removing a

wrapper will result in a psik reisha (a certain yet unintended result) or the letters being torn, the wrapper must not be removed. Hagoan Rav Moshe writes in a teshuva (see IG'M O'Ch 1:135) that separating letters of a word is also a transgression of Mechika, and therefore one may not cut between the letters of a word either.

Cutting cakes and other foods with letters or meaningful designs (i.e. tefillin on a bar mitzvah cake) that will become illegible as the result of the cutting also presents a question of mochaik. The Oruch Hashulchan offers various rationales to justify those who are lenient in this matter. Nevertheless, the Mishna Berura and other poskim rule that one should not cut through such a cake; rather the following suggestions should be utilized. Many bakeries offer the option of placing a sheet of wax paper under the words thereby facilitating the removal of the entire word without any damage to the letters. This should be done if possible. If one remembers before Shabbos, he can avoid the problem by pre-cutting the cake between the letters. On Shabbos he may then separate and eat the pre-cut pieces and he need not be concerned if the letters are destroyed by his teeth in the course of normal eating (see M.B. 340:15). However, he should be careful not to break apart the individual piece by hand prior to placing it in his mouth. One must take note that in order for pre-cutting to be effective, the pieces of cake must be completely detached. The Mishna Berura also allows one to feed such a cake to young children even if the cake was not pre-cut. If one finds himself with a cake with lettering on Shabbos, ideally he should remove the top layer of icing together with the words. Hagoan Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (quoted by the Shmiras Shabbos Khilchosa 9 footnote 48) permits one to cut between the letters and then allow the individual letters to be destroyed by his mouth. As we mentioned earlier, Rav Moshe considers separating the letters of a word to be Mechika. One may speculate that perhaps he would therefore object to cutting the cake in this manner. This speculation, however, is far from certain because with regard to cutting a cake, there are many other rationales which allow for leniency, and perhaps Rav Moshe would also permit it. Apparently the minhag ha'olom is to follow the ruling of Hagoan R' Shlomo Zalman. (Harav Dovid Zucker shlita).

One is permitted to break animal crackers, Alpha Bits, or cookies and biscuits with words impressed or embossed on them. In such scenarios, the letters are an integral part of the food itself. The halacha therefore views the words as secondary to the food itself, rather than as a means of conveying a message. As such, erasing these words is not a transgression of Mechika.

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