

The Weekly Daf



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Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Shavuos 42-49

Two, Three, Four — Same or More?

| | Case 1 | Case2 |
|------------------------|--|---|
| The Cases: | Reuven borrows money from Shimon and says to him: "You will enjoy credibility as powerful as two witnesses if you ever claim that I did not repay this loan." Reuven subsequently repaid the loan in the presence of three witnesses. Shimon, however, persists in his demand for payment on the basis that Reuven granted him credibility greater than that of the testimony of witnesses. | The same scenario as Case One except that Reuven said that Shimon would enjoy the credibility of three witnesses and Shimon subsequently repaid him in front of four witnesses. |
| The Ruling: | In Case One Shimon wins and in Case Two Reuven wins. | |
| The Problem: | Two witnesses have the same credibility as a hundred. This is why Shimon wins in Case One. Since he was granted credibility to contradict two witnesses this power extends to three as well. Why then does he lose in Case Two where the same principle should apply? | |
| The Resolution: | In Case One Reuven accorded Shimon the credibility of witness testimony so that there is no room for distinguishing between two and three. In Case Two he was obviously not referring to the credibility of witness testimony since he spoke of the power of three witnesses, one more than is necessary for achieving the maximum credibility of witnesses. We therefore conclude that he meant to limit Shimon's credibility to the status of three experts appraising the value of an object whose evaluation is powerless against a conflicting appraisal offered by four experts. While he did commit himself to believing Shimon against the testimony of three witnesses he did not accord him this power against four. | |

Shavuos 42a

Greatness by Proximity

"...Until the great river, the Euphrates." (Devarim 1:7)

"...and the fourth river was the Euphrates." (Bereishis 2:14)

Why is the Euphrates described in Devarim as the "great river" when in Bereishis it is listed as the fourth of the rivers flowing out of Eden, an indication that it is the smallest of the rivers?

The answer lies in the greatness of Eretz Yisrael. Since the Euphrates is described as a boundary of the Holy Land it is accorded the title of "great" despite its relative smallness in size. This concept of achieving greatness through proximity is expressed in two different folk sayings:

"Touch the man whose body is smeared with oil and your hands will also become oily." — Shimon ben Tarfon

"The servant of the king is like the king." — Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael

It may be suggested that these two folk sayings quoted by the sages focus on two different dimensions of greatness achieved through proximity. The first is that greatness is contagious and affects those who come into close contact with it. The second is that even if one who is near the king does not absorb any of his greatness he must be accorded the respect due to the king because he represents his greatness.

Shavuos 47b

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