

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Chullin 138-Bechoros 3

Week of 27 Teves-4 Shevat 5757 / 6 12 January 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

The Thoughts that Count

Both Acheir (the Sage Rabbi Elisha ben Avuya, teacher of Rabbi Meir) and his grandson, Rabbi Yaakov, saw — each in his time — a similar incident which challenged their faith.

A father asked his son to climb up to a high place and bring him some fledgling birds after dispatching their mother. The son duly fulfilled these two mitzvos — honoring parents and dispatching the mother bird — for which the Torah promises the reward of long life, and upon his return he fell and died.

Acheir lost his faith. His grandson, however, reached the conclusion that the reward promised was to be enjoyed upon the resurrection of the dead in "a world which was altogether long and good" and not in the transient existence of our world.

The Talmud questions both of their conclusions by suggesting that there may indeed be a reward of long life in this world, but that the youngster who fell to his death may have been guilty of entertaining thoughts of idol worship, for which one is punished even if the thought does not culminate in action.

One of the commentaries raises a challenge from this question to the explanation offered by Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) in Rosh Hashana 17b as to why the name Hashem appears twice in the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy to reveal that Hashem is merciful both before the sin is committed and afterwards. There is a need for Divine mercy before the sin, he explains, in the case of one who is thinking of worshipping idols. Hashem's mercy withholds the punishment due him for such a thought until he actually carries out his intention, and only then punishes him for both thought and deed. If even in regard to thoughts of idol worship there is no punishment before the deed, how can the Talmud suggest that the son met his untimely death because of his idolatrous thought alone?

The Korban Nesanel, in his commentary on the Rosh, distinguishes between an idolatrous thought which did not come to fruition because of his repentance as opposed to that which did not come to fruition because circumstances did not enable him to carry out his plan. In the first case there is no punishment at all, and it is to such a situation which the Rosh refers. Our Talmud's suggestion is that the son may have thought of worshipping idols and was prevented by circumstances in which case he would be culpable for the thought alone.

Chullin 142a

The Problem of the First-Born

A *bechor*, the male first born of a kosher animal owned by a Jew, is considered holy and must be given to a *kohen* who offers it as a sacrifice and eats its flesh, or slaughters it for consumption if it has developed a blemish disqualifying it as a sacrifice. The *bechor's* holiness prevents anyone from shearing its wool or using it for work.

This created a serious problem in post-*Beis Hamikdash* times when sacrifices were no longer possible. There was a danger that the *bechor*, lingering in the *kohen's* possession until it developed a blemish, would be shorn or used for work. What some Jews did to avoid the problem was to sell a share of the pregnant mother or her unborn *bechor* to a non-Jew, whose partnership exempted the animal from the status of *bechor* when it was born.

Rabbi Mori, the son of Rachel (the daughter of the Sage Shmuel, who was impregnated by her non-Jewish captor who subsequently converted; but, since he was not Jewish at the time of conception, his biological son was always referred to by his mother's name) was in the practice of selling the ear of the unborn animal to a non-Jew, and then giving the *bechor* to a *kohen* when it was born. He did not wish to personally benefit from this transaction, so he gave away the *bechor*, but he took the precaution of eliminating the status of *bechor* by making this sale so that the *kohen* would not be placed in danger of transgressing the ban on shearing or working with the *bechor* while waiting for it to develop a physical blemish which would allow him to slaughter it for food.

Despite his noble intentions Rabbi Mori suffered a loss of all his animals. Why?

One of the explanations offered in the Talmud is that Rabbi Mori inadvertently misled other Jews who followed his lead and completely avoided the responsibility of the laws of *bechor* by selling a share of the unborn *bechor* to a non-Jew. They failed, however, to make the transaction in the proper legal fashion which was followed by a scholar like Rabbi Mori himself and thus ended up with an animal which was in reality a *bechor* but which they mistakenly assumed to be free of that status.

The custom of Jews throughout the centuries has been to sell a non-Jew a share in the pregnant mother in order to eliminate the problems arising from a *bechor* in post-Temple times. Tosefos, among others, explain why this is done, despite the fact that Rabbi Mori was punished for doing so.

Bechoros 3b

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

©1997 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

The Weekly Daf is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America. Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub dafyomi {your full name}" to listproc@virtual.co.il

☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel ☎ 972-2-581-0315 fax: 972-2-581-2890 ✉ ohr@virtual.co.il
☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA ☎ 1-212-213-3100 fax: 1-212-213-8717 ✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com
☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada ☎ 1-905-886-5730 fax: 1-905-886-6065 ✉ Somayach@MSN.com

Dedication opportunities are available for The Weekly Daf — Please contact us for details.

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

Issue #152 - Chullin 138-Bechoros 3

For the week of 27 Teves-4 Shevat 5757 / 6 12 January 1997 (Parshas Vaera)