

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Shabbos 30-36

Week of 30 Kislev-6 Teves 5758 / 29 December 1997-4 January 1998
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Whose Candle Must Go?

When Rabbi Tanchum of Noi received the following question he decided to use it as a topic for his public lecture:
"If there is a candle whose light is preventing a mortally ill person from sleeping and thus endangering his life — may one extinguish this candle on Shabbos?"

He began his lecture with a reference to the words of King David in *Tehillim* that "the dead cannot praise Hashem," and stressed the urgency of studying Torah and performing *mitzvos* during one's lifetime because there is no opportunity to do so after death. After a lengthy discourse on the circumstances of David's own death on Shabbos, the sage concluded his lecture with this ruling on the halachic question put to him:

"The light created by man is called a candle and man's soul is called a candle (*Mishlei* 20:27). It is preferable for man's candle to be extinguished in favor of Hashem's candle."

Maharsha points to the similarity between this *gemara* and one further on in *Mesechta Shabbos* (151b) in which Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel states:

"The Shabbos may be violated to save the life of a one-day old baby but not to bury King David. In regard to the child we say that it is preferable to violate one Shabbos to enable this child to observe many future Shabboses, but in regard to King David there is no longer any possibility for him to perform any *mitzvos*."

The interesting thing about both of these two aforementioned rationales for violating the Shabbos to save a life is that neither of them is the conclusive source for the ruling. In the Talmudic discussion of this source (*Mesechta Yoma* 85b) the explanation about the candle is not even mentioned and the one about observing future Shabboses is rejected as inadequate. The only fully adequate source, concludes the *gemara*, is the passage (*Vayikra* 18:5) "You shall live in them," which teaches us that wherever there is even a reasonable possibility that Shabbos observance may endanger life it must be abandoned.

Rashi explains that since uneducated people came to public lectures it was the policy of sages like Rabbi Tanchum to embellish their halachic rulings with such homiletic explanations which would be more effective in getting their point across.

Shabbos 30

Two of Each

After spending twelve years of intense Torah study in the cave where they hid from their Roman pursuers, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar found difficulty in reconciling themselves with an imperfect world in which people neglected Torah study. Even after being sent back to the cave for another year by Hashem for being too destructive in their criticism, Rabbi Elazar still could not make peace with the world despite his father's efforts to change his perspective. He finally succeeded in doing so on one occasion so dramatically described in the *gemara*.

Shabbos was approaching and an elderly Jew was rushing home clutching two bundles of *hadassim* (myrtle branches) in his hands. "What are these for?" the sages asked him. "To honor the Shabbos," he replied. "But isn't one bundle enough?" they wondered. "One is for *Zachor*," he explained, "and the other for *Shamor*."

"See how Jews love their *mitzvos*," said Rabbi Shimon to his son, who finally made peace with an imperfect world.

In the two Torah accounts of the Ten Commandments, the commandment regarding Shabbos is once introduced (*Shmos* 20:8) with the words "*Zachor* (remember) the Shabbos" and another time (*Devarim* 5:12) "*Shamor* (observe) the Shabbos." Although both *Zachor* and *Shamor* were said in one Divine word, as we say in our *Lecha Dodi* prayer on Shabbos Eve, they refer to two different dimensions of this holy day. *Zachor* relates to the positive actions we do on Shabbos to sanctify it — *Kiddush*, prayers, meals and *zemiros* songs — while *Shamor* is the title for the vast category of creative labors prohibited on the Day of Rest.

The custom of lighting at least two candles in honor of the Shabbos is also based on the need to focus on both of these dimensions. The *hadassim* in their role of fragrant beauty serve as a source for the flowers which decorate the Shabbos table. But Maharsha sees another dimension in the choice of *hadassim* which appear in Tanach (*Zecharia* 1:8) as a symbol of the righteous. Just as we learned (*Shabbos* 23a) that one who is diligent in lighting Shabbos candles will merit having sons who are Torah scholars, so will Shabbos-honoring *hadassim*, representing righteousness, achieve the same goal.

Shabbos 33b

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