

The Weekly Daf



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Shabbos 44-50

Week of 14-20 Teves 5758 / 12-18 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

A Tale of Two Fires

What is the psychological condition of a person who sees something precious to him threatened by a fire on Shabbos?

There seem to be two conflicting perspectives. Here Rabbi Yehuda ben Lakish rules that although it is forbidden by rabbinic law to move a corpse on Shabbos in regular fashion because it is considered *muktzeh*, it may be removed from a burning building to the safety of an adjacent courtyard. The reason given is that the Sages feared that a person's anxiety over the likelihood of his dear departed being consumed by fire might motivate him to violate the Shabbos and extinguish the fire. They therefore relaxed their restriction on *muktzeh* in this case.

In a later *gemara* (*Shabbos 117b*), however, we learn that a person whose home is on fire may not rescue from the flames more than the food required for the remaining Shabbos meals. The reason given is that if he is given a free hand to save everything possible he may become so anxious in his rescue effort that he will forget that it is Shabbos and will extinguish the fire.

How is it, asks Tosefos, that in one case our concern for his anxiety causes the Sages to take a lenient position in rescuing the corpse from the flames and in the other case our concern for his anxiety moves us to restrict his rescue efforts?

The solution, explains Tosefos, lies in the degree of anxiety one has over something threatened by fire. One is not so anxious over the loss of his possessions that he will extinguish a fire on Shabbos to save them. But if he is let loose to save them, his preoccupation with their rescue may cause him to forget the Shabbos and involuntarily violate it by extinguishing the fire. In regard to a dear departed one there is concern that he may become so overcome with panic over the danger of the corpse being burned that he will commit the serious sin of willingly extinguishing the fire to save it.

Shabbos 44a

The Mitzvah of Washing

When a certain fragrant, non-soap cleansing agent was brought before a group of Sages gathered at a Shabbos meal, the Sage Ameimar and Rabbi Ashi availed themselves of it to wash their hands and faces. When their colleague, the Sage Mar Zutra, refused to do so they assumed it was because he was concerned that it might pull some hairs from his face in violation of Shabbos. Only when they challenged his reluctance, on the basis of a ruling by Rabbi Sheshes that there was no problem as regards Shabbos, did Rabbi Mordechai explain Mar Zutra's behavior in a different manner. This sage would not use such stuff even on the weekdays because he considered such attention to cleanliness effeminate behavior which is improper for a man.

The position of the other sages is based on two passages in *Mishlei*. The one quoted in our *gemara* is "Hashem has made everything for His own purpose" (*Mishlei 16:4*), which Rashi explains as meaning that since man was created in Hashem's image, he has a responsibility to care for his body. The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba 34:3*) cites another passage: "The merciful man shows kindness to his own being" (*Mishlei 11:17*) and tells the story of the Sage Hillel who personified this ideal.

When Hillel took leave of his disciples and headed for the bathhouse he told them he was about to fulfill a mitzvah. In response to their curiosity about what sort of mitzvah there was in bathing himself, he called their attention to the compensation and honor awarded to the man responsible for regularly washing the statues of the king standing in the theaters and stadiums. If this is how they honor the likeness of an earthly king, he concluded, how much more so must I, who was created in the image of the King of kings, be careful to wash myself!

Shabbos 50b

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