

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Pesachim 9-15

Week of 3 Elul - 9 Elul 5758 / 24 - 30 August 1998

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

Who is a Prophet?

A charming play on words is used by the Sage Rava in his challenge to a point made by his colleague, the Sage Abaye.

The background for their dialogue is an apparent contradiction between two *mishnayos*. One *mishna* (9a) informs us that once you have inspected one corner of a room and head for another corner, you need not fear that a *chulda* (a rodent) has dragged *chametz* to the corner you checked, and therefore there is no need for a new inspection. The very next *mishna* (10b) states that whatever *chametz* one leaves after inspection should be carefully hidden so it does not get dragged away by a rodent; otherwise, there is a need for a new inspection. Do we suspect rodent intervention or not?

Abaye suggests that the inspection referred to in the first *mishna* takes place on the 13th of Nissan, two days before Pesach, when plenty of bread is still to be found in homes, and the *chulda* therefore has no motivation to snatch *chametz* and store it. The second *mishna*, however, discusses an inspection which takes place at the regular time, the evening of the 14th, when the *chulda* observes that there is a scarcity of bread; therefore, the *chulda* is likely to snatch any *chametz* it can find.

"Is a *chulda* a prophetess?" asks Rava. Does a simple rodent possess the prescience to know that no more bread will be baked that day, and that it therefore must take desperate measures to snatch whatever *chametz* is in sight? Rava therefore suggests his own solution, that the need to hide the *chametz* mentioned in the second *mishna* is that otherwise we may actually see the *chulda* snatch some of the *chametz*, and consequently we would be required to search the house again.

"Is a *chulda* a prophetess" is a take-off on the name of the Prophetess Chulda mentioned in *Melachim II* 22:14, in reference to a Torah scroll which the *Kohen Gadol* found concealed beneath the floor of the *Beis Hamikdash*. The scroll was brought before the righteous King Yoshiyahu, who asked his scribe to read aloud from the column to which the scroll opened. When he heard the words "Hashem will lead you into exile along with your king," the Torah's warning of the Divine punishment which will be visited upon a sinful nation, the king rent his garments out of fear that this was directed at him. Since the Prophet Yirmiyahu was away at the time, the king sent emissaries to the Prophetess Chulda to seek a clarification of the Heavenly message. She informed the emissaries in Hashem's Name that this grim prophecy would indeed be fulfilled because of the Jewish People's idolatrous ways. But because the king had reacted to the message with such repentance, it would not happen in his days.

In her message to the king, however, she indicated a slight amount of haughtiness. Her words were: "Say to the *man* who sent you to me." She indicated a haughtiness for failing to refer to him as *king*. Our Sages (*Mesechta Megillah* 14b) say that it was this haughtiness which caused her name to be synonymous with that of a rodent.

Pesachim 9b

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Above Suspicion

Yochanan of Chakukah came before the Sage Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi) with a problem. A Jew had left in Yochanan's safekeeping a pouch of *chametz* which now faced a double danger of going to waste. First of all, the pouch had been punctured by rodents and its contents were oozing out. Secondly, it was the morning of the 14th of Nissan, the day before Pesach, and in a matter of hours this *chametz* would become forbidden to be eaten or enjoyed in any way. Should he take an initiative to sell this *chametz* to save its owner from a total loss?

When he asked during the first hour of the day, Rebbi told him to wait, since there was a chance that the owner might come to retrieve his *chametz*. The same counsel was given in each of the three subsequent hours when the question was raised. Only when the fifth hour arrived did Rebbi tell Yochanan to sell it in the marketplace in order to save the owner from a total loss.

There is a difference of opinion amongst the later Talmudic Sages as to whether he told him to sell it to a Jew or to a non-Jew. This depends on whether a Jew is still permitted to eat *chametz* during the fifth hour on *Erev Pesach*. According to Rabbi Yehuda, even though Torah law allows *chametz* to be eaten until the end of the sixth hour, the Sages banned eating it two hours earlier in order to prevent the possibility of mistakenly thinking that the hour of prohibition had not yet arrived. If a Jew cannot eat *chametz* during the fifth hour, then the sale had to have been to a non-Jew.

The opinion of Rabbi Meir, however, is that even by Rabbinic law only in the sixth hour is *chametz* forbidden. Rabbi Yosef points out that according to this view the *chametz* was sold to a Jew in that fifth hour.

His disciple, the Sage Abaye, challenged Rabbi Yosef's interpretation of the incident with Rebbi. If Rebbi concurred with Rabbi Meir's lenient view, he asked, why did he tell him to go to the trouble of selling it in the marketplace rather than advise him to buy it for himself?

Rabbi Yosef's response was that it was improper to buy it for himself, because that would arouse suspicion that he had exploited the situation and fixed too low a value on the *chametz*. This standard of caution was set by our Sages in regard to charity trustees as well. If they have in their treasury many copper coins which are in danger of becoming rusty and must therefore be exchanged for their equivalent value in silver coins, they must conduct this exchange with others, and not use their own silver for this purpose. Similarly, if they are trustees of food collected for distribution to the poor and must sell leftover food before it spoils, they must sell it to others and not to themselves.

The guiding principle of avoiding suspicion for these trustees, and of the counsel given by Rebbi to Yochanan of Chakukah, is expressed in the Torah (*Bamidbar 32:20*): "You shall be clean before Hashem and before Israel."

Pesachim 13a

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