

The Weekly Daf



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Bechoros 4-10

Week of 5-11 Shevat 5757 / 13-19 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

Milk and Honey

Whatever is secreted from an animal whose flesh is forbidden to eat is also prohibited. This includes the juices of non-kosher fish and the milk of non-kosher animals.

This rule raises an interesting problem regarding the milk of kosher animals. While such an animal is alive it is forbidden to eat from its flesh. Why then is it permitted to drink the milk secreted from the forbidden flesh?

In response to this challenge the Talmud presents three different passages from Tanach to prove that milk is an exception to this rule. One of these is the description of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Shmos* 3:17) as "a land flowing with milk and honey." If milk were not permitted for consumption, concludes the Talmud, it would not be employed in the praise of the Promised Land.

Another exception to the aforementioned rule is the honey of a bee. Although the bee itself is a forbidden insect, the honey it secretes is permitted for consumption. The reason is that the pollen ingested by the bees is converted to honey by them without the addition of any of their own secretions.

A Torah leader of the previous generation was once criticized for his activism on behalf of Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael*. If the people in the forefront of the secular Zionist movement are so anti-religious, they asked, what good can we expect to emanate from their efforts? His clever response was that there are two exceptions to the rule that what emanates from an impure source is also impure — milk and honey. *Eretz Yisrael* is described as the land of milk and honey (even though the honey referred to in that passage is that which flows from dates, the word honey is also commonly applied to bee honey) in order to teach us that in regard to the Holy Land there is the possibility of something positive emanating from a problematic source.

Bechoros 6b-7b

The Donkey's Distinction

"Why are the first born of donkeys different from the first born of horses and camels?"

This was the challenge posed to Rabbi Elazar by Rabbi Chanina in the "*Beis Hamidrash Hagadol*" concerning the Torah command (*Shmos* 13:13) to redeem the first born of a donkey by giving a *kohen* a lamb.

"This is a Torah dictate," replied Rabbi Elazar. "Another reason is that the donkeys helped the Children of Israel when they left Egypt. There was not a single one of Israel who did not have ninety excellent donkeys to carry the silver and gold of Egypt."

At first glance it appears that the first reason offered by Rabbi Elazar is not a reason at all, but rather a statement that this is a Heavenly decree whose reason is unknown to us, just as there are other dictates of this nature. But a look at Rashi's commentary in Chumash of the aforementioned passage indicates otherwise.

"Only the first born of a donkey," writes Rashi, "and not that of any other impure animals. This is a Heavenly decree based on the concept that the Egyptian first born are compared in Tanach to donkeys."

Maharsha thus explains Rashi's approach: Rabbi Elazar never intended to apply the concept of "Torah dictate" to the question posed to him, because this seemed inappropriate to a command concerning which the Torah is so specific in declaring its significance as a reminder of the Exodus. He therefore understood that Rabbi Elazar was actually dealing with two challenges: 1) Why should the command to remember the slaying of the Egyptian first born and the sparing of the Israelites necessitate extending a statue of sanctity even to an impure animal? 2) Why only the donkey? To this he first replied that even though it seems strange, it was a "Torah decree" to extend the sanctity of the first born to the donkey because of the comparison of Egyptian first born to donkeys. He then added that the donkey's role in transporting the wealth of Egypt was a reminder of the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham that his descendants would leave their exile "with great wealth" and therefore gave this animal a distinction not shared by other impure animals

Bechoros 5b

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