

The Weekly Daf



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Me'ilah 19-Kinnim 25

Week of 25 Sivan 1 Tamuz 5757 / 30 June-6 July 1997
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Mountains and Hairs

"Like mountains hanging upon a hair."

This is the description of the laws of *me'ilah* (misuse of sacred property for secular purpose, which if done unintentionally requires a sacrifice for atonement) that the Mishnah offers in *Mesechta Chagigah* (10a). There are laws we have encountered in *Mesechta Me'ilah*, which we are now concluding, that are only vaguely hinted at in the Written Law of Torah and which seem to sometimes defy a simple understanding, so that they can be compared to "mountains hanging on a hair."

The Sage Rava (*Chagigah* 10b) cites as the prime example of such complexity a law mentioned in our Gemara. A person sends an agent to spend some Sanctuary funds whose sacred nature is unknown to both of them. If the sender does not become aware that these funds belong to the Sanctuary before the agent spends them, then he is guilty of *me'ilah*. Although this runs counter to the general rule that one cannot be an agent for another in regard to responsibility for sin, the Gemara points out that the Torah made *me'ilah* an exception to this rule. But, if the sender becomes aware that these are Sanctuary funds and the agent does not, then the agent is guilty of *me'ilah*.

It is understandable why the sender is not guilty. Since he is now aware that this is sacred money he no longer wants the agent to spend it, so that person is no longer considered his agent. But the poor agent, asks Rava, why should he be held responsible for something in which he is so blameless?

The Gemara attempts to reduce the enormity of Rava's wonder by comparing this case to the classic situation of *me'ilah* in which a person unknowingly misappropriates sacred funds which he assumed to be his own and must bring a sacrifice to atone for his error. Rava, however, distinguishes between the two situations. The classic case of *me'ilah* is where the offender is aware that he has Sanctuary property in his possession, and is therefore held responsible for not being sufficiently careful in not mistaking it for his own. The agent, however, has no knowledge that the sender has any sacred property in his possession, and appears to be completely blameless. It is therefore an exercise of "hanging mountains on a hair" to compare his responsibility to the classical case with its greater negligence.

Me'ilah 21a

Old Age Benefits

As ignorant people grow older their thinking becomes more confused. But as Torah scholars age their thinking becomes more settled.

This remarkable observation on age and wisdom made by Rabbi Shimon ben Akashya on the basis of two conflicting passages in *Iyov* (12:12,20) has been placed at the conclusion of *Mesechta Kinnim*, which is probably the most complex section of the entire Talmud and requires the greatest measure of wisdom to master it.

An eloquent explanation of the aging process of the Torah scholar is offered by Tiferes Yisrael in his commentary on *Mishnayos*:

"As the Torah scholar grows old and his physical strength seems to wane, his mental strength increases and adds perfection to his soul. Now that his passions have become subdued and he is free from having to expend so much energy on bodily needs, his mental power spreads its wings and enables him to fully attach himself to Torah."

Age brings to every person a substantial measure of worldly wisdom based on human experience, a wisdom which is cited by Rabbi Yochanan (*Kiddushin* 33a) as a reason for showing any elderly person respect. But if this wisdom is not utilized for learning Torah it can end up being lost as a victim to the aging process affecting the body.

This idea of Torah prosperity in advanced age may also be found in the words of Rabbi Nehorai (*Kiddushin* 82b) who declared that he preferred to train his son as a Torah scholar rather than any other profession, for only Torah provides for a person even in his old age, as King David declares (*Tehillim* 92:15): "Even in old age shall they blossom and they shall be wholesome and fresh."

Kinnim 25a

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