

VAEIRA (EXODUS 6:2-9:35)

Not So Loud, the Bread Can Hear You!

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Did you ever wonder why the *Challah* is covered with a cloth on Friday night? We set the table with two whole loaves of bread and a cup of wine for *Kiddush*. The bread is covered while Kiddush is recited over the wine. What is the significance of hiding the bread?

One of the reasons for this custom is that on Shabbos, we depart from the usual order of blessings. Normally, when eating or drinking foods, we first recite the blessing over the food or beverage which is more significant. Bread is more important than wine. Therefore, we recite "*Hamotzie*," the bread blessing, before "*Borei P'ri Hagafen*," the wine blessing.

Shabbos, however, is different. Since we recite the Kiddush before beginning the meal, we end up saying the wine blessing before the bread blessing. In order not to prevent the bread from being "embarrassed" by this deviation from protocol, we cover the Challah so it won't "see" what's going on.

EMBARRASSED? BREAD?! Isn't that strange?

A similar question presents itself in this week's Torah Portion. In this and next week's Torah readings, we will read about the Ten Plagues. Some of the plagues were brought on through the actions of Moses, and some came through the actions of Aaron. The first plague was supposed to be brought by Moses, but ended up being done by Aaron:

G-d told Moses to warn the Pharaoh, that a plague was coming. He told him to say, "*I (meaning **Moses**) will strike the water of the Nile with the staff in **my** hand, and the water will turn to blood.*" (Exodus, 7:14)

When the time came to actually bring this plague, however, it was **Aaron** who did the hitting. What led G-d to change His command and have Aaron strike the Nile instead of Moses?

It seems that Moses had a conflict of interest. How could he be so ungrateful to the Nile, which had saved his life so many years before? After all, the Nile had been so kind as to float the basket containing the baby Moses into the saving arms of the daughter of the Pharaoh. How could he be so ungrateful as to turn the Nile to blood? Where was his appreciation?

Excuse me? Appreciation? Are we really so concerned about the feelings of a river and a loaf of bread?! Why are we thanking bodies of water and hiding embarrassed Challahs?

We humans cannot see the supernatural such as angels and G-d. Is the Torah telling us that we should also believe that inanimate objects are actually "living" and conscious beings with feelings and egos?

I don't think so. I believe that the Torah is giving us an important lesson in relationships. Does a river really expect to be thanked for courtesies rendered? No. Is it really possible to humiliate a mixture of flour, water, and yeast? No. So why do we pretend otherwise?

Our concern for the Nile and the bread should carry over to our treatment of PEOPLE. Moses was not permitted to hit the Nile. We hide the Challah from the "discomfort" of having its blessing pre-empted by that of the wine. The truth is that the Nile and the Challah couldn't care less. The point is to teach us how mindful we must be of the feelings of our fellow man.

Imagine the scene. The Shabbos table is set. Everyone is hungry, and waiting to say Kiddush and begin the meal. Dad lifts the cup to say Kiddush... then he sees it...the Challah cover is missing. Dad gets annoyed: "Of all the...what's the matter with you?!!" he bellows. "Can't you remember a simple thing like a Challah cover?!!!!!"

Stop. Think a second. Do you really want to lace into someone for making a mistake? Do you really want to embarrass your wife or son or daughter (OR YOURSELF!) by flying off the handle? Look at the lengths to which we go to protect the "self-esteem" of objects that have none! How much more so do we need to make sure to avoid hurting another person.

Think of the Nile. It doesn't need appreciation, but it gets it anyway. Think of the Challah. You don't want to embarrass an inanimate object by saying Kiddush in front of an uncovered loaf. Doesn't your wife deserve at least as much respect as a piece of bread?

We teach ourselves to avoid presenting an "uncomfortable" situation to an object that doesn't know the difference. We certainly need to do the same with a human being who does.

Have a great Shabbos.

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