



HEMDAT YAMIM

חֵמְדַּת יָמִימ

Parashat Hashavua Chayei Sarah, Cheshvan 24 5786

Harav Shaul Israeli zt"l
Founder and President

137 and the Power of Uncertainty

Harav Yosef Carmel

The *parasha* opens with “the life of Sarah,” mentioned twice along with her 127 years. Since it tells of her death, it might have been more appropriate to say that she died at the age of 127. Much has been written about the stress on her life. The Midrash Hagadol (ad loc.) connects this to the *pasuk*, “He asked for life, You gave it to him – long life forever” (Tehillim 21:5). The *midrash* says that the life forever refers to the life of the World to Come. This is the real life, and thus Sarah’s life did not end. What looks like life from the viewpoint of the material world is not really life. We will investigate a similar approach with very different parameters.

The number that opens our *parasha* is, again, 127. A similarly phrased *pasuk* at the end of the *parasha* gives the years of Yishmael’s life as 137. This number appears twice in *Parashat Vaeira* as the years of the lives of Moshe’s forebears, Levi and Amram, which is a strong indication that the number is significant. Explaining the connection will help us answer our question.

The Jewish doctor, poet, and philosopher, R. Yedaya Hapenini Habadrashi made an enigmatic statement: “The point of knowledge is that we should not know.” While many quoted and agreed with him, we must ask how **lack of knowledge** can be the point of **knowledge**?

Let us compare the goals of Torah study and of study of science. A scientist wants to understand as much as possible, especially the principles, and come up with a formula that gives the correct answer for each test case. If the results of the test cases do not work out with the principles, he knows that some knowledge is missing, and he must continue his work. It would seem there is no way to bridge the gap between these fields – Torah values lack of knowledge, whereas science values only knowledge.

Around 100 years ago, science began identifying areas in which it is impossible to apply standard physical equations. For one, it is now accepted that we can never know an electron’s location or momentum. Second, we will probably not succeed in incorporating into one system of formulas the four forces that operate in nature: gravitational force, electrical-electromagnetic force, weak atomic force, and strong atomic force. A third example: apparently, we will not succeed in knowing and defining the universe in all its parts and their locations, in relation to a specific point.

There is also a group of scientists who have accepted R. Yedaya’s thesis that a transcendental being exists outside the physical world, which controls the happenings in the world. While they do not believe in Hashem, it is a historical step forward. One cause is the realization that human conception is limited. Another is the discovery of constants without which the world could not exist as it does.

One important constant is the number 1/137 (called, the fine structure constant), which relates to the strength of the electromagnetic interaction between elementary charged particles. The importance of this constant was studied by two Jews, Arnold Sommerfeld and Wolfgang Pauli, the latter of which started learning Kabbala when he learned that its *gematria* is 137.

I would suggest that these developments are part of the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecies that the whole world will eventually accept Hashem’s dominion.

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Ask the Rabbi

by Rav Daniel Mann

Drawer with Aluminum Foil Roll

Question: In one of my kitchen cabinet drawers, I keep a roll of aluminum foil along with items I may use on Shabbat. May I open this drawer on Shabbat?

Answer: We will first identify a roll of aluminum foil's *muktzeh* status. An object that is not fit for use on the present Shabbat is *muktzeh*. If it is a usable "utensil," but its main use is for forbidden purposes, it is a relatively lenient form of *muktzeh* called *kli shemelachto l'issur*. If it is not yet a utensil (or a food) and making it one would require a Shabbat violation or a pre-Shabbat designation for permitted usage, it is the more severe *muktzeh machamat gufo* (intrinsic *muktzeh*) (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 308:38; Rama ad loc. 7).

Aluminum foil is not used when on its roll; rather, one cuts a piece to size for its present purpose, which is then a usable utensil. Since it is forbidden to cut such a piece (see Orchot Shabbat 19:125), we view the roll according to its present stage – as an unusable object (ibid.). (A roll of toilet paper, though, is not *muktzeh* (ibid. 126) because when there are no viable alternatives, there are halachic ways to use the toilet paper (see Living the Halachic Process I, C-16)).

When a *muktzeh* item rests on an otherwise non-*muktzeh* object, the "base" can take on the *muktzeh* item's status, based on a concept called *bassis l'davar ha'asur* (Shulchan Aruch, OC 310:7). There are several conditions for the status of *bassis* to exist: 1) The *muktzeh* was on the base when Shabbat entered (ibid.; Mishna Berura 266:26). 2) The *muktzeh* was placed with the intention that it would remain there on Shabbat in a significant manner (Shulchan Aruch, OC 309:4; see Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 20:520). 3) The *muktzeh* item(s) is more "important" than non-*muktzeh* items that also rest there (Shulchan Aruch, OC 310:8).

From your description, it sounds like conditions 1 and 2 are met, so the question depends on whether the aluminum foil (and other *muktzeh* items) is more important than the non-*muktzeh*. In this context, a *kli shemelachto l'issur* is treated as non-*muktzeh*. Since such items may be moved for usage purpose and when they are in the way (ibid. 308:3), the drawer may be opened to make available the objects you wish to use and then closed.

The individual homeowner's perspective on importance is the determinant (Mishna Berura 310:33). A prominent early source, the Magen Avraham (277:8), posits that *challa* is more important than the candles on the table. However, regarding more exact parameters, there are many opinions (see Orchot Shabbat 19:(414)). Some suggest that importance depends on overall value to the person (i.e., if he could choose what to hold on to, which would it be, so that price is crucial) (Q&A 14 of Rav S.Z. Auerbach in Tiltulei Shabbat). Other opinions stress functionality in the specific context (Igrot Moshe, OC V, 22.17 assumes that glasses are more important than a relatively large amount of money, but only if it is his only pair). Still others consider the relationship between the objects and the specific *bassis* (Shevet Halevi VIII:52 says that a *challa* is more important than candles/candlesticks on a table where one eats). Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (20:55) posits that it is crucial for the permitted object to be necessary for Shabbat. In any case, these parameters are unlikely to make a difference in a drawer used for general storage, where many things could possibly be used at this time.

Usually, when a *muktzeh* item does not make the base a *bassis*, we should still shake off the *muktzeh* before further moving the base, if this is feasible (Shulchan Aruch, OC 310:8). However, it is not feasible to simply shake out a cabinet drawer. While moving the *muktzeh* aluminum foil along with the drawer seems regrettable, no halachic construct forbids keeping it in the drawer when it does not create a *bassis* (see Orchot Shabbat 19:(386)).

Therefore, if the aluminum foil and other fully *muktzeh* items are a minority in importance, you may pull out the drawer on Shabbat.

"Behind the Scenes" Zoom shiur

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Moreshet Shaul

(from the works of Hagaon Harav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l)

Connection between *Talmid Chacham* and *Am Ha'aretz*

Based on Siach Shaul, Pirkei Machshava V'Hadracha p. 665

The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 52b) says: "What does a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) seem like in the eyes of an *am ha'aretz* (ignorant and/or weakly religious person)? Initially, he appears to him as a flask of gold. Once they speak together, he appears to be like a flask of silver. Once the *talmid chacham* benefits monetarily from him, he appears to be like a flask of pottery, which, once it breaks, can no longer be used."

There are few and weak connections and mutual relationships that can develop between a *talmid chacham* and an *am ha'aretz*. Their "meeting area" is small because of the lack of overlap in their spiritual lives, which is the main part of a person's life. They are two distinct types of people, with disparate spiritual approaches and aspirations. Therefore, one will not understand the other or be sensitive to questions that agitate the other's heart.

The *am ha'aretz* recognizes that the *talmid chacham* is different from him. He feels the *talmid chacham's* superiority and the grandeur that surrounds his spiritual greatness and is attacked by a feeling of deficiency in his surroundings. However, when external circumstances put the two into ongoing connections, and he starts to view all of the specific elements of the *talmid chacham's* life as an individual, the *am ha'aretz* loses his perspective. Since the *am ha'aretz* appreciates natural phenomena that everyone who lives under the sun experiences, he becomes very aware of the mundane elements of everyone's lives, including great people.

As this happens, the *am ha'aretz* loses sight of the special characteristics of people of lofty spirit because he lacks the necessary spiritual connection and sensitivity. The elements of the *talmid chacham's* persona that he grasps are those that are shared by all. The *am ha'aretz* then concludes that only from a distance does the *talmid chacham* seem like a giant, and that he was in awe of him by mistake, as the great person is really like everyone else. If along with this psychological process, the *am ha'aretz* also gives benefit to the *talmid chacham* from his resources, he will see his own "greatness," and the *talmid chacham* will be downgraded to the level of a "flask of pottery," which is useless after being broken.

The *am ha'aretz* does not realize that it is his blindness that prevents him from seeing the greatness of the man in his midst. Actually, the greater a person is, the more he develops the "strings" that tie him to every person with a spirit within him. The truly great person draws from the storehouse of his counterpart's spirit, including the "wellsprings" of one who is unaware he possesses them. About such a person, the Rabbis said, "Who is wise? He who learns from every person" (Avot 4:1).

When we refer to a *talmid chacham*, we mean the *talmid* (student) of a *chacham* (scholar); the *talmid chacham's* teacher is the true scholar. Who is the teacher of the *chacham*? Everyone! Just like a student is intellectually sustained by his teacher, the teacher draws life inspiration from his students, as the Rabbis said: "... and [I learned] more from my students than from anyone else" (Ta'anit 7).

A person's greatness enables him to draw more "life-giving water from an abandoned, muddy wellspring." This is the secret tool of wisdom.

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A Seller with Questionable Rights to the Property – part III

(based on ruling 84062 of the Eretz Hemdah-Gazit Rabbinical Courts)

Case: Multiple plaintiffs (=pl), each paying different amounts, bought land from a company (=def1), owned by def2, dealing with land sold by Arabs, in the periphery of a *yishuv*. Years went by without the deal being completed, so pl demanded their payment back according to par 5.6 of their contract. Although a different document states that pl cannot get their money back, it was never signed, and the signed contract says that it supersedes other agreements. Pl claims that def violated their agreement by not advancing it over years. More fundamentally, the sale should be void because pl was misinformed, as def has not provided any proof they own the property they purported to sell. [We saw that pl was able to nullify the sale because of misrepresentation.] Pl claims that the money he invested should be returned, linked to inflation and with interest because this is standard business procedure and because occupying pl's money with a fraudulent sale damaged pl's ability to earn money during this time.

Ruling: The claim that return of the money with interest should be considered standard cannot be applied here because the contract discusses cases of return of money and says that it will be without increase. Although *beit din* accepted pl's claim that the contract is to be voided, we still see that the sides did not work with an assumption that there would be more than a nominal return. Even linking to the inflation rate is not a standard assumption in an era of modest inflation, where the money's basic value remains intact.

There is a *machloket* whether there is a damage payment when Reuven keeps Shimon's money away from him. Although the Rama (Choshen Mishpat 292:7) says there is no payment, many accept the Chatam Sofer's (CM 178) distinction that when there is near certainty that Shimon would have earned profit with the money, he is entitled to damage payment. However, in this case, pl invested his money in a purchase of a speculative nature, where profits could not be assumed. Furthermore, it is apparent from many halachic discussions of sales that were nullified due to a variety of flaws that only that which was paid is returned and no more (Bava Batra 93b is one example).

In addition to the above, it would also be a problem of *ribbit* for pl to receive more than he gave. This applies even to linking to inflation in an era of moderate inflation. It is true that one can learn from the Rama (CM 192:7) that when one steals, if he returns more than he took, it is not *ribbit*, as *ribbit* classically applies to loans. However, the money returned from a nullified sale is considered like a loan in this regard (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 174:7). The Maharam Shick (YD 161) says that in cases of severe deception, the money received can be considered like theft, but pl did not prove that the misinformation in this case rose to that level.

Therefore, def must return to pl all the money pl paid but not more than that.

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