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The Two Most Important Words Ever Spoken

It is possible that the two word's Lech Lecha, are the most important words ever spoken. As Hashem's first communication to the first Jew, they embody the essence of what it means to be a Jew.

Hashem is telling Avraham to travel (Lech) away from his homeland, to Eretz Yisroel. The Meforshim question what the word Lecha (literally to you) comes to add to the meaning of this command.

Rashi and the Ramban explain that the intent is "go for yourself", that travelling to Eretz Yisroel would be a source of benefit and goodness for Avraham. There in Eretz Yisroel, Avraham would merit children, become a great nation and his reputation would spread.

The Kabbalists take a different approach, interpreting the words Lech Lecha literally - "go to you". The Zohar teaches that Hashem was sending Avraham on a spiritual journey to perfect himself and his level.

Pri Tzaddik elaborates on the words of the Zohar. The angels are described by the Novi as Omdim (literally standers), because they are fixed in their level. In contrast, the Neshama is called a Mehalech (a mover). A Jew's Avodah is to be constantly refining ourselves and striving to grow and raise ourselves upwards.

In an amazing commentary, the Alshich writes that Hashem told Avraham "Do not think that your level in Chutz Laaretz and in Eretz Yisroel is the same. While you are in Chutz Laaretz you cannot cleave to your source and to your essence. You will remain separated from yourself. But when you travel to Eretz Yisroel, you will be travelling towards and uniting with your source and with your essence." Lech Lecha - go to yourself - means to go to one's essence. That essence is to cleave to Hashem.

The Alter Rebbe connects this message to end of verse "to the land that I will show you". The word Areka can also mean "I will reveal you". Hashem tells Avraham that through this journey, I will reveal your true self.

To reach this essence, Avraham is told to leave his land (Artzecha), his birthplace (Moladtecha) and his father's house (Beis Avicha). The commentaries explain that this not just a physical departure, but a mental or psychological departure.

They refer to the key influences in a person's life that can be the source of acquiring negative Middos and ways of thinking and behaving; the ways of one's land, the influence of one's friends and the influence of one's parents and upbringing.

Chassidus goes a step further, explaining that one's land, birthplace and father's house, also refer to layers of one's own personality, alluding to the Animalistic soul. The path of spiritual growth requires us to leave these as well.

Artzecha - refers to the course "earthy" behaviours of the animalistic soul. ***Moladetcha*** - refers to the emotional drives and urges of the animalistic soul. ***Beis Avicha*** - refers to the intellect and understanding and thinking of the animalistic soul.

But the journey does not end there. To reach one's true essence, it is insufficient to leave the constraints from the negative and unholy layers of our animalistic soul. We also need to strip down the layers of our G-dly soul that also create obscure our true essence.

Just as they refer to the attributes of our Animalistic soul, the terms Artzecha, Moladtecha and Beis Avicha allude to the different dimensions of our G-dly soul; our desire, our emotions and our intellect.

These expressions of the G-dly soul are holy. They are our desire for Hashem and to connect to Him through feeling and understanding. Their deficiency is that they are tinged with a sense of self, a personal craving for connection. It's about "your" experience; "your land" "your birthplace" "your father's house".

The essence of a Jew is Kabbolas Ol, absolute surrender to Hashem; not because it makes sense, not because we understand and not because we feel, but because that is who we are and what we have to do. It's not about us, it's about Hashem.

This is why the Torah's narrative of Avraham and the Jewish people starts with Lech Lecha. It is the perpetual call for us to "go to yourself", to reveal our essence though absolute surrender to Hashem.

Chassidus on the Parsha

"I will be your Shield"

The first Bracha of Shemoneh Esrei is the Bracha of Avos. The Bracha ends with the words ברוך אתה ה' מגן אברהם, blessing Hashem who is the "Shield of Avraham".

This phrase is borrowed from Parshas Lech Lecha, when Hashem says "Do not fear Avraham, I will be your shield" אנכי מגן לך

Avraham embodied the Divine attribute of Chessed - loving kindness. Chessed was his very nature and was expressed in how he would serve Hashem and relate to his fellow man.

Like the Divine attributes, Avraham's Chessed was unlimited; Everyone was good in his eyes and he would shower them with unbounded love, whether they deserved it or not.

Pure unadulterated kindness without discerning whether it is deserved or not, is not necessarily a good thing. In the absence of discipline and expectations, unlimited kindness only serves to foster negativity and negative behaviours.

The ultimate purpose of Creation is that negativity will be eradicated from the world. A world run with pure Chessed will not allow negativity to be uprooted. For this we need Din - judgement, strictness and discipline.

And so each morning, when the attribute of Avraham - Hashem's kindness flows into the world, we make the blessing Magen Avraham.

Like a shield which covers its bearer, we ask Hashem to shield and limit His Chessed, so that it does not flow in its full intensity to the forces of negativity.

The message for us is that whilst we must have the Middah of Chessed, kindness, love and generosity, our Chessed must be shielded to ensure that it is constructive and does not allow evil and negativity to be accepted and tolerated.

1. Shabbos 73a
2. Rashi Shabbos 73a ד"ה האופה
3. Sefer Hazichronos
4. Mishna Berura introduction to Siman 319
5. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 319:4 and Shulchan Aruch Harav 319:1. This follows the majority view of the Rishonim; Rabbeinu Chananel, Tosfos, Rambam, Rif, Sema"g. There are Rishonim who permit taking Pesoles from Ochel with one's hand for immediate use, including Rabbeinu Yishaya, Rashb"a and Rabbeinu Yerucham. This is also the opinion of the Tur.
6. Shulchan Aruch 319:3. Shulchan Aruch Harav 319:5 based on Girsa of Rabbeinu Chananel, Rosh on the Beraisa Shabbos 74a
7. Shulchan Aruch 319:2 based on Abaye Shabbos 74a as explained by the Rishonim above. Shulchan Aruch Harav 319:2
8. Shulchan Aruch 319:1 and Shulchan Aruch Harav 319:1.
9. Shabbos 139b
10. Orach Chaim 319:14, Shulchan Aruch Harav 319:18
11. Magen Avraham 319:15 quoting the Ra"n
12. Based on Shabbos 139b as explained by the Ra"n. Brought in Rambam 8:14 and Shulchan Aruch 319:10. See Shulchan Aruch Harav 319:13-14
13. Shabbos 139b
14. Mishneh Torah Hilchos Shabbos 8:14
15. Orach Chaim 319:9
16. Shabbos 139b
17. Orach Chaim 319:13
18. Siman 53
19. Ben Ish Chai, Shevisas Hashabbos Borrer, Az Nidberu 1:23, Minchas Yitzchak 7:23, Shevet Halevi 1:84, Yechave Daas 2:51
20. Unless there are additional factors for leniency, such as where the tea leave are small enough that they could flow through anyway.

The Weekly Halacha Analysis

Borrer Issues in Making Coffee & Tea

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

One of the 39 Melachos forbidden on Shabbos is the Melacha of Borrer - selecting[1]. Borrer was performed in the construction of the Mishkan in the making of the dyes for the curtains and coverings. As part of this process, it was necessary to separate impurities such as chaff, from the dye plants and herbs[2].

Borrer is one of the most practical and frequently encountered issues in observing the laws of Shabbos. As such, it is one of the most 'difficult' Melachos to navigate[3]. Due to ignorance of the Halachos, many people inadvertently transgress this Melacha[4].

In this article, we will explore some of the practical applications of Borrer as they relate to making tea and coffee.

Review of the Parameters of Borrer

Under the laws of Borrer, it is forbidden to remove Pesoles from Ochel (literally refuse from food) on Shabbos. If one were to remove Pesoles from Ochel, even if they did so by hand they would be transgressing Shabbos on the Biblical level, even if it is being done for immediate use[5].

Pesoles can include "absolute refuse" or inedible matter. But the laws of Borrer are not limited to absolute refuse. When one has a mixture of different foods and they only wish to eat one of the food-types, the food-type that they wish to eat is defined as Ochel (desirable) and the food that they do not wish to eat now, is defined as Pesoles (undesirable)[6].

Even when taking the Ochel (desirable) from the Pesoles (undesirable), there are further limitations. One may only select the Ochel for immediate use. If one selects the Ochel for later use, it is considered as "Borrer for storage", which is Biblically forbidden[7].

Even when selecting the Ochel for immediate use, it is only permissible if the Borrer is done by hand. If one used a vessel or implement that is specifically made for performing the act of Borrer, such as a slotted spoon, strainer, sieve or colander, it will remain Biblically forbidden[8]. Using a non-specific implement to do the Borrer would be Rabbinically forbidden.

French-press

A French-press (also known as a coffee plunger) works by placing coffee grounds in a beaker and leaving it to steep in boiling water. After waiting the desired amount of time, the plunger, which is fitted with a metal filter mesh, is pushed down to the bottom. This separates the coffee grounds from the liquid. The clear coffee can then be poured into a cup.

Both pushing down the plunger and pouring out the coffee with the filter in place, present an issue of Borrer. Since it employs a strainer, this would be Biblically forbidden.

Nonetheless, the French-press may be used in a permissible way based on the following. The Gemara[9] teaches that one may tilt a barrel to pour out the wine, leaving the sediment inside the barrel. This may be done only if one stops pouring while it is still easily flowing, before reaching the bottom where the liquid is mixed in with the sediment. This is brought in the Shulchan Aruch[10].

The rationale is that until one reaches the point that their pouring is noticeably separating the wine from sediment, it is not considered Borrer[11].

Applying this to the French-press, if the strainer is not pushed all the way down, so that a significant amount of the liquid coffee remains below the filter, this will be permissible as no noticeable separation is taking place. Similarly, when pouring out the coffee, one should ensure to stop pouring while it is still free-flowing and there is still some liquid coffee left mixed with the sediments.

Another scope for leniency would be if most people would drink the coffee with sediments in it[12]. However, this seems unlikely to be the case.

Filter Coffee

Another method of coffee-making is by using a filter. In this method, coffee grounds are placed into a filter that sits on top of the coffee cup. Boiling water is poured over the grounds, where it absorbs it absorbs the coffee flavour and colour. The coffee drips into the cup through the filter, ensuring that no sediment comes through.

Even though one may not pour a beverage that has sediment in it, through a strainer on Shabbos, the Mishna[13] teaches that if the (wine) sediments were in strainer from before Shabbos, one may pour water over them on Shabbos so that they run through clear. This is done for the water to absorb the wine flavour. The Mishna's ruling is brought by the Rambam[14] and Shulchan Aruch[15].

The reason that this is permissible is that the water was not mixed with any sediments, so pouring it into the strainer does not cause any Borrer. The water running through the strainer, leaving the sediment behind, occurs by itself. Further, one's intention is only that the water absorb the flavour.

Even though the Mishna writes that the sediment was there from before Shabbos, the rationale applies on Shabbos as well.

Based on this, making coffee with a filter in the manner described above will be permissible on Shabbos.

However, one may only pour the water and leave it to filter by itself. One may not do any action to assist the filtration, such as shaking, tapping or stirring the filter. Doing so would be a Biblically forbidden action.

Smart Filters

There is a new variation of the coffee filter called "Smart filters". These filters have a button that opens and closes the holes of the filter. By closing the holes, it allows the boiling water to remain in the filter with the grounds for a long time, to better absorb the flavour. After steeping, pressing the button opens the holes and allows the coffee to filter and drip into the cup.

Use of the filter in this manner is forbidden. In this case, the water and grounds are mixed together and "opening" the filter causes the Borrer separation to take place.

Teapot with Filter

May one use a teapot that has a filter fitted into the spout? These teapots are used by placing tea leaves in the pot with boiling water. When pouring the tea, the filter prevents the tea leave from coming out and falling into one's cup.

The Gemara[16] teaches that one may not put straw or twigs at the opening of a pitcher from which one pours liquid, as this resembles using a strainer. This is recorded in the Shulchan Aruch[17] which writes "there is no greater strainer than this". Seemingly, a teapot with a strainer in the spout is identical.

Whilst the Chazon Ish[18] was lenient, most Acharonim[19] are stringent and the Poskim struggle to understand the basis for leniency and do not rely on this[20]. As such, one may only pour from the teapot in the manner discussed above, stopping to pour before Borrer would be noticeable.

Bishul

Tea leaves are defined as Kalei Habishul and so we are concerned that they may cook even in a Kli Sheni. Likewise, coffee grounds are subject to cooking. Even though they have been roasted, they may be subject to subsequent cooking (Bishul). As such, the boiling water should be in a Kli Shelishi before adding the tea or coffee. Pouring from a Kli Sheini over the coffee would also be acceptable.

Sources on reverse